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THE BOOK OF THE DRY FLY

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1. MAY-FLY (light).

2. GREAT RED SPINNER  
*Imago of March-brown.*

3. GRANNOM.

4. JENNY SPINNER  
*Imago of Iron-blue Dun.*

5. LITTLE MAY DUN.

6. RED SPINNER  
*Imago of Blue Dun.*

7. BLACK GNAT.

8. BLUE DUN.

9. AIDER.

11. YELLOW DUN.

10. IRON-BLUE DUN.

13. MARCH-BROWN.

12. MAY-FLY (dark).

*To face Plate of Natural Flies.*



# THE BOOK OF THE DRY FLY

BY

GEORGE A. B. DEWAR

AUTHOR OF

'THE GLAMOUR OF THE EARTH,' 'LIFE AND SPORT IN HAMPSHIRE,'  
'THE BIRDS OF OUR WOOD,' 'THE FAERY YEAR,' ETC.

NEW EDITION, WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

THE DUKE OF RUTLAND

AND

J. E. BOOTH

WITH EIGHT FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

LONDON

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

1910

*First Edition published in 1897.*  
*Second Edition published July 1910.*



LH  
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1910

TO

LORD NORTHCLIFFE

OFTEN MY ANGLING COMPANION

SINCE MAY 1896 ON HERTFORDSHIRE TROUT STREAMS

AND IN JUNE 1910 ON A LOVELY HAMPSHIRE BROOK

908821



## THE DRY FLY: A RETROSPECT

*READING again this book, which was written in 1895-96, and revising it for a new edition, I recall some very good angling days. I probably had the notion of dry-fly fishing, the main principles of it, whilst a child, for my boyhood was spent among chalk hills and chalk streams. The Bourne took its rise in my brother's manor, and the Anton a few miles south at a spot once owned by my family. But I think I began to fish with the dry fly on the Kent Darent at Farningham, though I recall one day before that on the Gloucestershire Coln at Fairford when I was at Oxford. I went there for the day with a college friend; I think he got a few small trout—I know I got none. Seven or eight years later came my days on the Darent. It was a very little*

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*stretch of water, but by spending the whole of long summer days on it I managed with the dry fly to pick up a good many trout. Evening fishing was most attractive there, especially in a little spinney where the trout roamed up and down, chopping at the flies. At the same time I was often fishing the Lea just above Hatfield and the head-waters of the Lea's tributary, the Mimram, with quite a wonderful man at angling of all kinds. There was an old and dear friend of mine, Frederick Pigou. The first fair-rising trout I took with the dry fly was taken with Pigou at my elbow directing me exactly what to do, almost directing my wrist as I cast. I fished dry and wet fly with Pigou, not only on those streams, but also on the Derbyshire Wye and on the Exmoor Barle at Simonsbath. He was the best of companions, courteous to everybody, full of gentle fun, an enthusiast, and a rare teller of good stories. It is a refreshment to be with a man like this, so unspoilt by praise, and with the heart of a boy in him whenever he went out to angle or to shoot. He*

*came to shoot with me once or twice in Hampshire about the time his strength was failing, and I shall not forget one week-end we spent together at an old farm-house. I scarcely saw him after that, and I never fished with him again.*

*He was a master unsurpassed and for ever unsurpassable, I should say, in the handling of his trout-rod and fine tackle. It was as if the rod grew out of his wonderful, unerring hand; and the way he put his flies and cast on the water, on the most difficult parts of the water often, seems to me, when I recall it, and when I contrast it with my own efforts at accuracy, rather nature than art.*

*In those days the Mimram between Welwyn and Codicote Mill was a beautiful little trout stream, and I had some great days there, both with Pigou and by myself. Once I went there with Arthur Booth as a companion, and had six brace of splendid trout weighing seventeen or eighteen pounds, I forget which. Most of these fish were taken under and close to the*

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*mill-wheel, but I took at various times good trout from Welwyn up to Codicote Mill, and there was one meadow about midway between the two which was perfect for the dry fly. Among others who fished there were Colonel Gathorne Hardy, Mr. Croft—a famous hand, I have always heard—and the Marquis of Granby. I also fished there once or twice with Mr. Alfred Harmsworth, now Lord Northcliffe—and often with him on a stretch of pretty water he had on the Lea at Wheathampstead.*

*That stretch of the Mimram when last I saw it was shrunk to a ditch, the trout were gone, and so was the little wooden club-house. Water companies do those things in Hertfordshire and elsewhere.*

*Trout ran up to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  or 3 lbs. on this upper stretch of the Mimram—the largest I took was  $2\frac{1}{2}$  lbs.—but below they ran much larger. On a stretch near Tewin I once saw an amazing rise of very heavy trout at the spent gnat. I got a small fish—small compared with the others—of over 3 lbs., but was smashed and weeded in*

*several heavy trout. One of these, which I saw quite distinctly in a small bay or backwash, was huge. Trout also ran heavy on the Lea at Hatfield. In the May-fly season Pigou would put back everything under 2 lbs. He made some great bags there. My best trout there was a bit over 3 lbs. Pigou had taken fish up to  $6\frac{1}{4}$  with a small dry fly.*

*Another period altogether was that on the Derbyshire Wye between Bakewell and Rowsley. Arthur and Jim Booth and I fished hard there for several seasons. It was and doubtless is a difficult water. The trout lie much in the little backwashes, and a good Test or Itchen angler might go to Bakewell and be surprised at his want of success at first. I believe it was more than a week before I got a sizable trout from the Wye, though the Booths were taking fish there all the while. The Lathkill and the Bradford streams hard by are not so difficult, perhaps, and there is not so much of that very delicate backwash fishing. They have been preserved by*

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*the Duke of Rutland and have a good head of trout. They are beautiful streams. I had good days there too, though rather on the Lathkill than on the Bradford which flows into it. I used to stay at the Rutland Arms, Bakewell, or the Peacock, Rowsley, but far more often at the former. Those were very keen angling days.*

*Later I drifted to the Test, near my old home, and on one stretch or another of the river have constantly angled since—there and in other Hampshire and Berkshire streams, such as the Kennet, the Lambourne, and the upper Loddon. Our old friend Colonel Earle of Enham had invited me to fish on the Anton once or twice, but I did not begin to fish Hampshire streams regularly till Henry Hammans asked me in the May-fly season 1897 to try the Test at Bransbury Common. We spent several days at the “Crook and Shears” there; it is one of the loveliest bits of river scenery I have ever seen, and I was happy in taking good trout of 2 lbs.—not a few of them. But Bransbury was understocked at the*



*time, and later it came to this—if one took a brace of sizable trout in the day one was lucky. Now the Common, I believe, is much better fishing, both the small and the large river holding a good stock of trout. At Bransbury I first met Horsley Palmer and Arthur Humbert—angling brings us good friends. One season I fished Chilbolton Common, where the trout were large and hard to take. Another season I had a rod on a small bit of water on the upper Test and got my allowance—four brace—several times; but fish there were rather small for the Test, rarely running over 1 lb.*

*At Laverstoke, still higher up the Test, when my friend Henry Grove had the water, and I was living part of the year at Oakley, I sometimes used to get 1½-lb. trout in splendid condition; this was in 1903.*

*The Kimbridge trout are splendid—and some of them very heavy, as I know to my cost. I have had several fish there of 3 lbs. and over on a fly dressed on the 00*

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*hook, but never a 4-lb. trout at Kimbridge or elsewhere; I half fear I never shall get the four-pounder.*

*I don't know that there is much to be added to the advice and suggestions as to dry-fly fishing which I gave in the first edition of this book. Flies are largely a matter of fancy: sometimes I think the wickham (used in bright weather) is the best of all; sometimes I incline to a light, medium or dark olive dun; sometimes to an iron-blue. These and red spinners and hares' ears, and a small winged May-fly (Holland dresses these as well as any one) in May-fly season, are as good as one can have in the fly-box. The alder is very good too, and the sedge for evening fishing.*

*But it is not the fly, on the whole, that gets the fish: it is the intent watching the fish, or for the fish, the waiting to find him in the right mood, the very careful stalking, and the true casting.*

*When once I hook a good trout in a weedy or snaggy spot, I bring instantly to bear all the power of rod I dare, and I*

*strive greatly to get below him. If a trout is below the angler, and leaps out of the water and splashes down on its side, the hold of the hook very often gives.*

*Keep the point of the rod well up—it is absolutely necessary—and let the rod bend like a bow: you must give a good fish the butt of the rod. If I had given the five-pounder I hooked and lost at Kimbridge in 1901 the butt at once, I might have had him; and the same with one or two of the great trout I hooked below Panshanger on the Mimram in 1894.*

*As to striking: should it be the instant the dimple at your fly is seen, or should you let the fish have a second or two seconds of grace, and then strike? Well, despite my finds on the lower Test, I agree with Sir E. Grey. I want to strike at once. Sometimes I miss my fish—often I miss my fish—but is it not exactly the same with those who count two or three ere striking? Don't they often miss?*

*However, it is a very different matter when you see not only the dimple, but the*

*fish itself rise to the fly. Then wait a bit ere striking, or you will be almost sure to snatch the fly from his mouth. You must chance the trout discovering the fly is not good to swallow and ejecting it. Count five or six leisurely ere striking when you see the fish distinctly, or you will miss and scare him. It has happened to me over and over again. It has happened to me more than once this season (1910). In this case the angler often, I believe, sees the trout's image in the water ere he sees the trout. The trout seems to have taken the fly, but it is an optical illusion. I learnt this through some remarks my old friend Miss A. E. Darwin, cousin of Charles Darwin, made me a few years ago. But I find it very hard to hold myself from striking at once, though I know from long experience it is wrong to do so.*

. . . . .

*I thank the many friends and many papers in this country and in America for the kind words they have spoken about this*

*book. It was written perhaps in a rather exuberant style of English, but it had its merit of a kind—it was the result of an entire enthusiasm for a pastime delicate and intensely interesting.*

*ABOYNE, N.B., July 1910.*

## PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

BY THE DUKE OF RUTLAND

To write a preface to a work on Dry-Fly Fishing would be ordinarily, in my humble judgment, nearly as daring a proceeding as to write a work itself on this fascinating subject. There are of necessity so many views held as to the best methods of using the dry fly, and such a number of diverse opinions firmly adhered to in regard to the details of the sport, that in advocating any particular volume as supplying information in a more useful way than that tendered by other works, one would at once be told—and rightly so—that one was writing in a purely partisan spirit.

But the author of *The Book of the Dry Fly* seems to me to deal so broadly

and fairly with this delicate piscatorial art, and to have so due an appreciation of the undoubted value not only of the different ways of using the dry fly, but also of what is termed “wet-fly” fishing, that in the present instance prefacing is a comparatively easy task.

Mr. Dewar, in the course of this work, touches on nearly all the points which are of distinct interest to him who would become proficient in this most enthralling branch of fly fishing, and, as I have before said, does not disdain to say something on what is also a most pleasant amusement, the practice of the wet fly.

Founding his observations and suggestions on experiences gained on the banks of many rivers—with several of which I am myself well acquainted—he goes into almost every matter that affects the dry-fly enthusiast, and does not omit to allude to some of the multitude of heart-rending misfortunes which in the course of a day’s sport so frequently beset the deftest and most accomplished fisherman.

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Moreover, the pages of *The Book of the Dry Fly* are instinct with the love of Nature, which in itself constitutes much of the charm of fishing, and without which I should hardly advise any one to become one of Old Izaak's followers.

This is hardly the place for a lengthy disquisition on the many interesting matters brought to the purview of the reader, but I would strongly recommend those who desire to improve the fishing in their rivers to note what Mr. Dewar says on excessive weed-cutting, and the absolute necessity of leaving a sufficient quantity of weeds in a trout stream. Many a river has been spoilt by an ignorant and over-zealous keeper removing nearly all the various weed-growths, thereby destroying food and shelter for the trout.

Indeed, I know of one glaring instance of a piece of water, in which six or seven years ago four and five pound trout could be killed and where three-pounders were numerous, but where now, owing to the



folly of those in charge of the stream, a trout of the last-mentioned size is a rare fish: the average weight indeed at this time would not be more than one pound. This depressing change is, in my belief, due solely to the incessant weed-cutting and raking up that, under the keeper's supervision, are constantly taking place.

Allusion is made in one of the chapters of this work to the courtesy and good feeling displayed toward the fisherman by those who live near trout streams. Mr. Dewar describes how, when fishing a length of the Bradford which runs within a few feet of a road, he noticed that the lead-miners and villagers, when passing, carefully walked as far from the stream as possible; thus by their thoughtfulness not disturbing the water and "putting down" the rising fish. No one knows the spot indicated better than I, and frequently has the same consideration been extended to me. I should like to record how greatly I, and many of those who have fished the Bradford with me,

are indebted to my friends of Youlgreave and Alport for this mark of their kindly good-feeling.

Before concluding this brief notice of *The Book of the Dry Fly*, I must venture to make one suggestion touching the observations of the author on “bulging” and “tailing” trout.

Mr. Dewar says that a trout that is “tailing”—*i.e.* feeding on freshwater shrimps or what-not—can sometimes be caught by the angler fishing for him with a large alder, and casting a long line *down* stream. In this I fully agree. But may I add that it is also possible to kill trout thus employed by fishing *up* stream, and slightly sinking the fly?

I have several times tried this method with success—always with the alder; and by waiting till the tail is less in evidence, which shows the trout has rested from his grubbing labours for a while, and taken his head out of the weeds, I have induced the fish to look with a favourable eye on the fly presented to his notice.

But I may not say more on the multitude of interesting matters which the reader will discover in this book.

No fisherman, however accomplished, can have learnt so much as to be above adding to his knowledge by studying a work such as *The Book of the Dry Fly*, which—from the mass of fishing information it supplies; from its sketches of that delightful scenery which always surrounds a trout stream in whatever county it may be; and from the evidences which appear on every page that its author is thoroughly in sympathy with the feelings, desires, and hopes of every one who follows this charming sport—will, I am confident, prove a volume worthy of being included in every angler's library.

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

IN this edition of *The Book of the Dry Fly* we have not included any illustrations of the artificial flies used in this branch of angling. The plates of artificial dry flies are useless to the dry-fly angler; indeed, the exact shades and the whole dressing of these flies is constantly being changed. But it is very necessary that anglers should be able to recognise the natural, live flies—especially the *Ephemeridae*, as May-fly and olive dun—which are hatched in chalk and limestone streams; I am glad therefore to see the plate of natural flies, which Mr. Edward Neale drew and coloured for the original edition, here reproduced.

As to the other illustrations, I think many anglers will be glad to have glimpses of the Test, Itchen, Avon, Darent, Wye (Derbyshire), and Whitewater; painted by well-known artists and here so finely reproduced.

The scene on the mid-Test especially appeals to me. It was close to this spot that I took my first Test trout (2 lbs.) in 1897 with a May-fly; whilst at the Gavel Acre shallows, still nearer, I have had many good trout and been broken in others. It is a place of enchantment and of an exquisite beauty.

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ANGLING

“A calmer of unquiet thoughts.”

SIR HENRY WOTTON.



# THE BOOK OF THE DRY FLY

## CHAPTER I

### THE PURSUIT OF THE TROUT

THE style of angling with a dry and floating fly over a rising trout is coming more and more into favour. Probably where there were a dozen dry-fly fishermen ten years ago, there are more than three times as many now. Figures, however, like the weights of trout and salmon hooked but not landed, are, where they cannot be exactly vouched for, deceiving; so perhaps it would be better to say that the number of anglers who now "fish the rise," instead of being content, as most trout fishermen were content not long ago, with a general whipping of the stream in all likely parts,

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is growing season by season. Instead of the methods of the dry-fly fishermen being confined to the Hampshire chalk streams, as the Test and Itchen have been nicely named, they have been extended to many suitable waters in the Midlands, North, West, and East of England, where the anglers often only know the chief waters of the South of England through report, having learnt all they know of their craft—which is not a little—in their own country.

Whatever it may have been a quarter of a century ago, and even more lately, the good trout of the Derbyshire Wye, at least of that stretch between Bakewell Dam and Rowsley Bridge—as fair a stretch of trouting water as one could wish for—now like the fly dry and floating not less than do the trout of the Test, Itchen, and Lambourne. Thus the dry fly on the Derbyshire Wye is no more an affectation than it is on those waters of the south which are absolutely associated with the style; and indeed,

## PURSUIT OF THE TROUT 3

as I shall try to prove in this volume, the dry fly is never an affectation, save when used in brawling impetuous streams of mountainous districts, where it is practically of no avail.

I have heard of the dry fly being used on the pools of some Norwegian rivers, but have never in any of the southern Scandinavian waters seen it used or tried it myself, nor even seen any stream at all suitable to a dry fly. As a fact, big flies, and several of them on the cast, are as much the ordinary style of fishing this kind of water as the single dun or spinner on the finest gut is the style on Test or Itchen. The dry fly is as clearly out of place on the wet-fly water as the wet fly is on the dry-fly stream.

If all streams could be definitely assigned a place in one or other of these classes, there could scarcely be any friction or difference of opinion between dry-fly and wet-fly anglers, such as does sometimes arise now. The man who swears by the sunk-fly style under normal

## 4 BOOK OF THE DRY FLY

conditions on the Test or Itchen is an eccentric, no more needing serious notice than the eccentric who carries his dry-fly principles to the length of fishing the rise on the Tweed or the moorland streams of Somerset and Devon with a single winged fly dressed to float and to cock upright. But when we come to streams, their number considerable, where both are practised—where many of the local authorities are alleged to fish with the wet fly, and, what is more, fill their creel of trout with it against all new-fangled doctrines—the thing is different.

Take the Derbyshire Wye or the famous Dove of the same county, and take the Rutland length of the former and what may be called the Izaak Walton length of the latter. To my view, these waters are dry-fly waters. In low bright water, when there is no fly out, or when what there is out is whirled off the stream into the heights of woody Dovedale, the Dove is neither for wet nor dry fly. Indeed,

when the fish are not rising in the Dove there is surely not a more hopeless stream in England, whether the time be boisterous April, or Midsummer, or sultry August. There are streams, especially in the home counties, where, with a little wind to cause a ripple, trout may be taken on days when no fin, save that of the shrimper and searcher after food at the bed of the brook, which no tackle-maker can imitate, stirs above the water, and when the trout seem as still as the snags and stones amid which they lurk. The Dove cannot be classed amongst such waters. Yet, when there comes a good steady hatch of duns, the Dove often shows a lovely rise of trout. Then skilled wet and dry fly anglers who know their water reckon on sport, and often get it. The most devout dry-fly fisherman cannot deny that the wet-fly method often makes the creel heavy on the Izaak Walton length of the Dove, as well as on the twin stream, the high-banked Manifold; whilst sometimes both methods are inferior, in the

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size of the bag, to the artificial minnow—often a deadly lure in the rough water and stickles, when spun by such a skilful hand as that of Mr. Prince, of the Walton. Yet, to my mind, the Izaak Walton length of the Dove, particularly about the Dove Holes, and also where it emerges from the Dale, is almost an ideal stream for the single floating dun or May-fly over the rising trout.

Though it is a beautiful thing to see a master of the art drop his fly as thistle-down on almost dead water—suffering it to float slowly down, dry and well cocked, so that it deceives the wariest of trout—most anglers prefer water with a little movement. The gentle flow of the Dove, with its slightly broken surface, helps the angler to make his floating fly a finely exact imitation of nature, and that is why one is inclined to describe it as in parts an almost ideal dry-fly stream. Moreover, when the water is very low and clear, the single fly over the rising fish must be, when nicely cast, the most

## PURSUIT OF THE TROUT 7

telling method. Trout do sometimes appear to take leave of their senses and grab at the most clumsy lures, as a gaudy Alexandra or a salmon fly, but rarely, if ever, when the slow-flowing water is like gin, the time summer (when nine fish out of ten are once more in condition), and the day cloudless and perfectly calm. We have all heard tales of men who can take trout, and take them fairly, with a wet fly ("none of your dry-fly fads!") under any known conditions, or in any water where there are trout to take; but we have heard, too, of showers of fish from the clouds.

Again, by the Derbyshire Wye the wet-fly angler sometimes has fair success when there is water and the fish have not yet come to be the crafty fish of the summer-time. The Derbyshire Wye in its lower length is noted for its many backwaters, or backwashes as some call them, and to fish with a cast of sunk flies these nooks and corners of the stream, with their still or very softly

## 8 BOOK OF THE DRY FLY

flowing water, is of no possible avail. But there is rough water in mid-stream, and occasionally under the banks, and here a trout may be hooked, though he will very rarely turn the scale at a pound. Grayling of course can be taken with a wet fly, that being indeed the best method for grayling. But then the dry fly for that decidedly inferior fish is not, as a rule, tried, save on the Itchen and one or two other south-country streams. Putting grayling out of the question—many trout fishermen would like to see them put out of the river—the Wye in the lengths to which I refer, and perhaps in the Buxton stretch, which is a somewhat different class of water, is now a less favourable stream for the ordinary and old-fashioned method than the Dove. The backwaters, even in the early spring, are impossible, save to the dry-fly angler, and it is here that the trout as the season advances prefer to feed—here and right under the banks in quiet eddies and oily-looking swirls, from which coigns



## PURSUIT OF THE TROUT 9

of vantage they have got into the habit of scrutinising all flies, real or imitation, that pass over them in a most critical manner. I once pricked a trout slightly, but without scaring him from the surface. After this the fish continued to feed, but in a far daintier way than he had been doing. Not only did he utterly reject the artificial, but in many cases he followed down a natural dun for several feet, closely examining it the while, and in the end rejecting it. Finally, my artificial, unskilfully cast, dragged badly across the current, and this so offended the trout that he faded into the depths.<sup>1</sup> Is it surprising that trout so fastidious, in low water and during the summer season, should be suspicious of any but an exact imitation of nature? And the lower Wye, as most frequenters of that water know to their sorrow and their triumph, abounds with such fish.

<sup>1</sup> On May 22nd and 23rd, and on June 4th, 5th, and 6th, 1910, I was fishing the Lyde in Hampshire. I took good trout up to 1½ lbs., but I scared many others by showing them a few inches too much gut.

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I have, however, admitted that the lower Wye, as well as the lower Dove, may be classed between the thorough wet-fly streams, as the Coquet, the Welsh Wye, and the moorland rivulets of the west country, and the true dry-fly streams like the Test, Itchen, Lambourne, and upper Lea; though I cannot suppose that three wet flies can in the hands even of the most skilful avail, in the long-run, on either Wye or Dove, against the single dry one deftly cast to the rising fish. Now, it is only as to this kind of stream that there can be any real difference of opinion between the two schools of fly fishing, and there is no reason for anglers to fall out and revile each other's styles, much less each other, even when the old and the new styles do come into contrast and rivalry. There is room for both, especially on the Wye, where grayling abound and prefer the sunk bumble of brilliant hue to the sombre floating dun or gnat. It is only the prig who sneers at the sight of the laborious

wet-fly angler fishing the whole stream from morn till eve; only the man too stiff or self-conscious to learn, who scoffs at what he regards as the affectation of the dry-fly angler assailing a single feeding trout, sometimes for over an hour at a stretch. Though there are bores and faddists who handle the rod, one is pleased to think that the ranks of true anglers do not contain a large number of aggressive and intolerant folk. Those that do exist are at a discount among most anglers by the streamside in the day-time, and at night in the smoking-room of the angling inn lord it over their peers with difficulty, and do not lord it long. The extremists thus disposed of, there is no reason why anglers, dry and wet, should not in this freemasonry forget their little differences, or if they must argue, then argue *gently*, as Walton advised his pupil to place the worm upon the hook. Dry-fly and wet-fly anglers can fish the same brooks at the same time, and, so they adhere to the etiquette of the sport and avoid scaring

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or pursuing one another's fish, be on as good terms as were *Piscator* and *Viator* of the *Compleat Angler*; more, they can now and then, without loss of dignity, try each other's methods with profit and pleasure. How both can regard the user of other and grosser baits, such as the worm and the natural May-fly—still used on Dove and Manifold—is another question, depending on the nature of the stream and the written or unwritten law thereof; but this much may be said for sure, that if the custom of the river is “artificial fly only,” they will sink their own little differences to condemn the angler whose methods are alien to the higher mode of sport. After all, it is only in the style of deceiving and hooking fish that dry-fly and wet-fly anglers—assuming both to be good sportsmen—can much differ. In nearly all other fly-fishing matters they must naturally be at one. Both rejoice in the rise of fly, in promising angling weather, in the long delicious day by the ever-companion-

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able river, and in the beauty of the scenery — for what stream where the trout and grayling thrive has not, through the angling season, beauty ?

The scenery which the dry-fly angler enjoys is not to be compared to that which so constantly opens out before the salmon fisherman amid the hills of Scotland, or in the rugged land of fiord and field. Yet it has a quiet beauty and a sweetness of its own. It takes us, this pursuit of the trout in the bright, low-murmuring streams of the home counties, by secluded woodland glades and dells, where the sun strikes through a deep overgrowth of oak and ruddy beech-tree leaves ; where the slender wood-warbler trills its song through the lengthening days of spring : to the edge and fringe of many little coppices, where, if you lie low and affect a cunning unconcern, you will see much bird and animal life ; will see the gorgeous pheasant strut forth and pick up a fat meal in the grasslands ; the noisy jay and

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the intensely nervous wood cushat flutter down from the hazel boughs, and eye you for a space with profound suspicion ; the rabbit pop out from its retreat, and for a moment alarm, and be alarmed by, its feathered friends. This pursuit of the trout will take us, too, through the luxuriant meadows, where the chalk stream seems to flow clearer than the clear air itself, where many a step crushes some scented water-flower, and where the corncrake never tires of confusing us as to its real hiding spot in the tall grass ; to dim groves of planted trees, where the mossy path is strewn with fir-cones, and the squirrels chase each other in glad security ; to stately parklands, where the gnarled oak tree stretches forth its vast limbs in such fantastic forms, and where the hare will almost suffer you to tread upon it rather than stir from its form ; and often, in sleepy southern shires, to the remote thatched homes of humble country-folk, where bunches of herbs hang above the great red-bricked

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hearth, and where you are always kindly welcome.

To those who have no soul for scenery, and to whom there never comes that intense longing to be steeped in the odours, colours, and delicious sensations of spendthrift summer, which has always seemed to me inseparable from this pastime, dry-fly fishing cannot be sincerely recommended. Men have been heard to say that, if they can kill fish, they care not where they angle, and that a monotonous muddy canal, with its grimy barges, its uninviting and exposed towing-path, would, if it yielded big trout, be as good in their eyes as a crystal stream. To any such, and to all those who are dull save when they are filling the creel, the pursuit of the trout in dry-fly waters can have only occasional attraction. We cannot always be killing fish, even where they are turned in every year by hundreds, and rise well to the artificial fly; and the chagrin and disgust of the creel-filler or pot-hunter when not a fin

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stirs from morn till night, the trout lying like stones on the bed of the stream, must be great. Even to the angler who from most waters will go home well content with his brace or two of good fish after an eight or ten hour day in the fields, with only a crust of bread for refreshment, and with no company save his pipe, this stone-like behaviour of the trout is at times a little trying. But how much he has to fall back on! Dry-fly fishing, unlike several other branches of the sport of angling, is being restricted almost entirely to summer and the loveliest weeks of spring. True, some rather impatient anglers get out their tackle and set to work in even the Arctic Aprils. In such seasons the river-side has no vegetation to shelter fish and fishermen, whilst the wind, which whistles through the dead reeds and bare, thin hedgerows, is often like the wind of frosty January. The dry-fly anglers of April, however, are tending in many places to become as rare as the shooters of the hare in March.



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Only in very forward seasons are trout fit for the creel before May. Sizable trout before May are usually out of condition, a two-pounder being a poor thing—lean, lanky and black. In April too the trout are usually not fastidious; when, weak after their exhausting spawning operations, they will, if on the feed, take a wet fly as soon as a dry one, and prefer a bunch of gaudy hackles and tinsel to a perfect imitation of the natural dun on the water. Thus in the case of several noted streams in the south it has become a wholesome and unwritten law amongst sportsmen that the trout shall be allowed to gorge themselves on shrimp and on fly—if any be out so soon—quite undisturbed whilst April lasts.

May well in, the angler should find many consolations if there be sport, save in the most backward and inclement seasons. The jungle of the river-side, which in midsummer is well-nigh impenetrable in many untrodden and

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unfrequented spots, may be still beneath the ground, and the edges of the stream that six weeks later will be lined with great hedges of high flowering willow herb and other water-side plants, may be still almost bare and exposed ; but the water meadows are splendid with the marsh buttercup, whilst every copse and hedgerow past which the angler strolls is full of spring's woodland blooms, with the cuckoo flowers, the wild anemones, and the blue-bells that grow in great thick patches which utterly put out the fainter blue of the dog-violets. Most years you may find these and many other flowers blooming some time early in May in the sheltered districts of the home counties. As for the songs of the summer warblers now settling to their nests, these are ceaseless whilst day lasts as the music of the brook ; and after the angler has taken to pieces his rod, and turned homeward in the thickening light, he may stop now and again for a few moments to listen closer to the

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nightingale singing in every spinney by the stream and the wayside. I have a note in my diary of such an evening a few seasons back in leafy Hertfordshire,<sup>1</sup> when the air was heavily laden with the rich scent of the May-tree. My bag held but one trout, a pound in weight, taking after a hard day's work. Yet it was a day that, despite meagre sport, left most pleasant memories ; a day that called one to loiter in the fields, and in the heat of the early afternoon, when the fish were not moving, to lie under an oak and wait for a hatch of fly. These loiterings, these often long waits, are inseparable from dry-fly fishing, and the man to whom they are good, as giving opportunity to watch the capricious fish, and to enjoy the natural sights and sounds around, if he is not already a good angler, has in him the makings of one. There is no surer sign of an unaccomplished dry-fly fisherman than hurrying, and a wish not to rest and

<sup>1</sup> I was fishing the Mimram above Welwyn. The stream there is ended now. Water companies have pumped it almost dry.—June 1910.

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wait for rises. The only time a good dry-fly fisherman ever perceptibly hurries after reaching the scene of action is when the light is swiftly going, and it is necessary to cast to a good fish, whose rise will be indistinguishable within a few minutes. One may also see a good man hurrying during a short, sharp rise of fish at the May-fly, which he knows by instinct, or by the experience of several days past, will be all over directly. Even here hurry often leads to flurry and fluster, which end in a ghastly kinking of the line and like enough a fishless creel. No : hastelensness, leisurely movement mark the good angler. "Wait and watch" would make an admirable text for the dry-fly fisherman. These waiting and watching intervals, these quiet saunterings, give abundant opportunities for watching Nature, and adding to our knowledge of the animal and insect life which teems throughout the greater part of the dry-fly fishing season. Only rarely can the man who has eyes, ears, and understanding for

the life of the brook feel lonely when alone on the banks of the trout stream; and even then it is not the feeling of terrible isolation that sometimes holds us in the midst of the crowded city. The angling gaps in the day of the dry-fly sportsman can be always so easily and pleasantly filled in by those who know how to steep themselves in the beauty of the day and in the life of the water meadows. The stickler for precept may see in the saunterer by the brook one who trifles away time, and the pot-hunter may regard such hours as the evils of fishing the rise; but Jefferies—who would surely have made a good dry-fly angler—has said that these hours spent with Nature are the only ones in which we truly live; and Aris Willmott in that delightful book, *Summer-time in the Country*, says that “they whom the world calls idle are doing the most.” I hope to show they are not only taking deep draughts of the glory of Nature, but also preparing to get the better of the craftiest and best trout in the water,

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which to be hooked need to be much studied.

The times, then, for dry-fly fishing are those when it is possible to loiter by the water, as Walton loved to loiter whole days by Shawford Brook. February and March are sometimes good seasons for the wet-fly angler in the north, or amongst the lively and early troutlets of the wild moorland streams of Devon and Somerset, but they are not to be thought of by the dry-fly angler. April is going out of favour for most streams. May begins the right season, and June is the cream of it. It's a poor dry-fly heart that does not rejoice in July and August, and he is rather a degenerate angler who entirely lays aside the trout-rod for the gun, even in September. A fine angling month September is in several dry-fly waters in Derbyshire. Some indeed hold that the trouting in the Wye is then at its best, there often being a steady rise of fish throughout the day. I have had good trout in that stream, in the pink of

condition, so late as the last week in September, and have seen other anglers have more. In the south, too, I recollect getting some beautiful trout in the Kennet at Hungerford—or in the branch known as the Dun—in the same month. Even in October trout are often taken by the grayling fisherman, and, owing to their handsome appearance and freedom from signs of the approaching spawning season, put back almost regretfully. The fence months, however, must begin at some time in the fall of the year, even if we do not fish till May is well in; and no sportsman will care to kill his trout after the light of the last day of September has died out.

## CHAPTER II

### FISHING THE STREAM AND FISHING THE RISE

IT is quite likely that many anglers and others ambitious to angle who go so far with me, and agree that beautiful scenery and ample opportunity to enjoy wild nature must add greatly to the pleasures of fishing, may still reserve judgment as to the peculiar advantages of this dry-fly method until they have heard more about its exact features. Is there any particular pleasure to be got from the practice of this style of angling quite apart from these attendant conditions of season, weather, and scenery? is often asked of the dry-fly fisherman. Much has been written about the method during



the last few years in books, magazines, and daily papers. "South West's" weekly budget of notes throughout the season concerning his beloved Test has been a feature of the *Field* for many years past; and Mr. Halford's *Dry-Fly Fishing* has treated the practical side of the subject, especially as to the Test, most thoroughly. And here one may remark upon the love of plain truth characteristic of the writings of these Test fishermen. That all anglers are dreamers of dreams is believed generally. Oddly, anglers themselves take no offence at this; on the contrary they encourage it by telling tales against one another, though never, so far as I have observed, against themselves. The weights of fish *do* depend sometimes on the particular frame of mind in which the angler who has hooked and lost his fish happens to be. The angler has his delusions. But to fish is not to lie. What must strike all readers of "South West's" notes, who are versed in angling or in entomological

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matters, is the clear desire to tell simple, straightforward truth, and sacrifice no particle of it to effect. "South West" never writes of a  $2\frac{1}{4}$ -lb. as a  $2\frac{1}{2}$ -lb. trout, and if anything he would perhaps rather take off an ounce than put one on. That is the impression left on readers of his dry-fly notes. Besides these authorities on the Test, a good many other writers have, of late, been busy with their pens in magazines, review, and evening paper on the method of dry-fly fishing. Yet it has seemed to me that the real end and aim of the dry-fly fisherman, who loves the dainty art for its own sake, have often been misunderstood by those that write on the subject, or neglected. The notion which many students of the literature of the day on this fascinating theme must get is that the dry fly is simply used on clear, slow-flowing streams, because it is the only effective way of assailing the big and highly educated trout which are found in these waters. Certainly that is one

reason why the dry-fly method is general on Test, Itchen, and other streams, but I shall hope to show that this in itself is by no means the sole object of fishing the rise.

I do not intend to deal in great detail with the angler's outfitting department—with such questions as to what build of rod, texture of line, size of fly-box, and colour of clothes are the best for the work. I do not much believe in the laws often laid down on these matters, and I have got into the habit sometimes of using tackle likely to bring one into the contempt of the maker and seller of fishing implements. I frankly admit that amongst my fishing stores there is scarcely a high-class implement. These stores do not include a split-cane rod<sup>1</sup>—which is a defect—or a reputable fishing-bag; some of the gut, though fine enough, does not taper, the winches are by no means of the latest pattern, many of the

<sup>1</sup> I used a hickory rod when this was written. Now generally I use a split cane of two joints, 10 feet long.—June 1910.

flies could not have cost more than two shillings a dozen, the lines are not more than about thirty yards in length, and as for the landing-net (which has now been in use at least five years), you could not purchase such a mean-looking article in any tackle-maker's in the whole of the West End of town. How can one who uses such rough implements as these take upon himself to give advice as about the gorgeous half-guinea boxes for flies, the five-guinea rods, and the ingenious landing-nets—things which double and twist up into nothing almost, and have bamboo handles polished—about all the costly odds and ends that have been devised of late years by inventors, whose object is to aid the angler in his pursuit of the trout? If he were to give any advice to the beginner, it would be this—do not make any save a very modest outlay until you have taken your first lessons by the river-side, and have learnt what tackle is really necessary, and what is ornamental and cumbersome. It is

not the rod so much as the hand which wields it that kills the trout, though it might be idle to deny that, given two equal performers, the man with the better implement has in the long-run the pull. There are things, of course, really indispensable, such as a waterproof line, fine sound gut, a well-made check winch, a not too whippy rod of not under 9 ft. 6 in. and of not over 10 ft. 6 in., with an assortment of neatly tied flies dressed on hooks that will neither straighten out like a bent pin, nor snap like a dry stick of macaroni. But I have little belief in the virtues of sumptuousness in the tackle of the dry-fly fisherman, or of the fisherman generally. Years ago, in very youthful angling days, I recollect spending many a sweet hour fishing in the river Liffey. Being young and innocent, I laid in all manner of useless things—most useless of all, a scale!—with which to assail the perch, roach, and other coarse fish, said by the obliging tackle-maker to dwell in

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considerable shoals in the Liffey a mile or two from Dublin. The fine spoons, paternosters, and many another tempting-looking lure and line in this collection, were the admiration and wonder of an aged and humble angler who was my sole companion in the water meadows. "Ah, faith," he would exclaim over and over again, "what entirely beautiful lines and hooks you have got, sorr—everything so pearfect!" Yet, despite all this wonderment, the aged one, with his shabby old home-made rod and his meagre assortment of hooks and the like, could show fish at the end of the day, whilst the young angler had never a one. It is the fisherman that makes the tackle, not the tackle the fisherman.

Equally doubtful am I about the use of giving written or printed lessons in casting, and precise directions how to strike, play, and land the trout when hooked. Probably not one man in a thousand can learn from a book how to cast a line, and how to deal with a trout

when hooked, and before hooked. You cannot thus cut and dry your dry-fly fishing. Indeed, I incline to believe that the best way to become an accomplished dry-fly fisherman is, in these matters, to steer clear of teachers and preachers, either in the book or in the flesh, get down to the water, look out for rising trout, and hammer away till one is at length hooked and landed—after very many have been scared. The man who tries to get it all up, and master even that wonderful feat the steeple cast, before he goes in pursuit of the trout, is too methodical by half; and if he does become an angler, it will very likely be the kind of angler who never casts more than three times to a fish, and who does all by strict rule. If it is impossible to give effective lessons by book in casting, striking, playing, and landing, it is only less difficult to give them, I have sometimes thought, by word of mouth at the water-side. Few things are more likely to prove irritating to the angler who has

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the idea of how things should be done, though clumsy as yet in his execution, than to have some one by his side incessantly directing him how to cast here or there, how to avoid the wind, and how and when to strike. Advice as to striking is perhaps the most useless and silly of all, as the strike, I think, must come intuitively. There *are* men who can give lessons in dry-fly fishing, but they are few. The tendency of the teacher is nearly always to give too much advice, and to begin giving it before the learner has had the least chance of finding out for himself how the thing can be done. The man who has got the idea of the principles of dry-fly fishing all right is in a fair way to teach himself how to kill his first brace of fair-rising trout, and when he has once done that, he will speedily have an insight into some of the delightful little details, some of the many devices for getting the best of wary trout in difficult places; devices for avoiding, for example, that hard thing





THE AVON, NEAR SALISBURY.



known as the "drag,"<sup>1</sup> for making the fly cock up perkily and sail downstream as the natural fly does, for fishing the most forbidden backwaters, and avoiding vicious snags, branches, and river-side herbs that grow in most inconvenient places. Many of these devices are at times the despair of the angler, when they prevent him neatly presenting the artificial fly, dry and cocked, to a bold and heavy trout in a hopelessly hard place; and yet were it not for these constant hardships and disappointments the sport would be far less than it is. In the difficulties of dry-fly fishing lies much of its charm, as in deer-stalking and in other sports and games.

But though it may not be of real service to make out long lists of the rods, reels, and tackle which the angler should lay in against his first attempts with the dry fly, or to instruct him precisely how to handle the rod and hook the fish, one

<sup>1</sup> The "drag" is explained on pages 57-60 and 63-64; the "cocked" fly on page 41.

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should not assume that he knows exactly what "fishing the rise" means, or how it essentially differs from the older method. In explaining the method of fishing the rise, dry-fly anglers usually find the best way to make the matter clear is to contrast the old and new styles; it is hard to convey a perfectly correct idea of what dry-fly work is save by this comparison. If I can do so without offending the believers of the wet fly, I shall be more fortunate than many who attempt to explain the difference between old and new. It has already been said that the dry fly is quite out of place in many trout streams. The dry-fly streams, though they have increased of late years, are still and ever must be in a decided minority; so that the believers in the old style have small cause to be aggrieved if as to a certain number of rivers in the South and Midlands a great superiority be claimed for the new style.

The best short description of the difference between wet and dry fly fish-

ing is that which describes the first as "fishing the stream," and the second as "fishing the rise." In ordinary wet-fly fishing we commonly use more than one fly. Besides the fly at the end of the gut called the dropper, there are one or two other flies fixed to the cast a foot or so apart. Some use four flies, and as many as six are sometimes used by anglers who appear to think that want of skill can be balanced by number of lures. Three flies, however, are the usual cast of the wet-fly angler. As a rule he fishes down or across stream, and does not strike till he *feels* his fish. It is true many good anglers hold that it is much more deadly to fish even with the wet fly upstream, inasmuch as, the fish having their heads upstream, the tendency of striking is to fix the hook into their mouths rather than pull it away; also it is truly said that the upstream angler approaches his fish in a more workman-like manner, and is less likely at close quarters to scare the quarry before the

flies are presented. But the wet-fly angler who fishes upstream often cannot tell, in the rapid-flowing water in which he angles, whether a trout has taken one of his flies or not, until he raises the rod for the next cast. It is not uncommon to hear in the billiard-room a candid player who has made a fluke say, "Nobody more surprised than the striker!" Nobody could have been more surprised than the striker—myself—when, fishing upstream one August afternoon in the lovely little Lyn, within a stone's throw of wooded Watersmeet, he drew back the rod for a fresh cast, broke his top joint, and jerked out on to some dry stones a beautiful half-pound trout. More often the trout breaks off, with or without a portion of gut cast, and the top joint remains. Even so it is not very satisfying. As the line is floating down to the angler there can be no pull felt, and so, unless the rise has been seen—and it is often hard to see in rough water—both man and fish are ignorant of the connection between them

till the raising of the rod for the next cast, and the sudden tightening of the line. Downstream fishing, therefore, is the usual way amongst wet-fly anglers. The flies, cast across stream and worked downwards, speedily sink from sight. Sometimes—it depends on the character of the water and the style of angling—no motion is given to the cast of flies, whilst in others they are worked backwards and forwards by a slight up-and-down movement of the rod-point, the object of this being to deceive wary trout and prevent them critically examining the flies to see whether they are really worth eating, or whether they come from a fishing-tackle shop.

The wet-fly fisherman does not, as a rule, cast his flies over a particular trout which he sees feeding. When he reaches the river-side he at once fits together the joints of his rod, and having chosen the flies which seem adapted to the state of the water and to the state of the weather, he runs the line through the rod rings,

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fastens on his gut-cast, and gets to work. There may be no natural flies on the water and no fish moving at surface food ; but this does not deter the angler from trying his fortune, and all the stickles, sharp runs, and places fitted for the wet and sunk fly are fished. Naturally, if he does see a ring made by a rising trout, he casts into it, or as near as possible, and in the same way angles with care over a fish which he sees and deems at all likely to rise, even though it be not actually feeding. It is not, however, the main business of the wet-fly fisherman to look out for rising trout or grayling, or to choose fish to offer his flies to. He fishes the whole stream, or all the likely-looking and accessible parts of it, and does not lay himself out to angle for certain chosen trout and grayling. It might not be too much to say that it is no more satisfaction to him to hook and land a particular feeding fish than to hook in a rough bit of water a fish of whose existence, till the tug on the line came, he knew nothing.



This, of course, is a mere outline of the method of fishing for trout and grayling with a cast of wet and sunk flies. Knowledge and skill are needed to make a basket of trout or grayling on wet-fly waters, and after dry-fly fishing, wet-fly fishing is probably the most scientific of all branches of angling.<sup>1</sup>

So much for the wet or sunk fly ; now for the dry and floating one. The dry-fly fisherman *never* uses more than one fly on his cast at the same time, and *never* fishes downstream when he can fish up. It is the aim of the wet-fly angler, as we have seen, to make his flies sink below the surface ; it is the aim of the dry-fly angler to prevent his fly from sinking below the surface. Directly it sinks, or shows signs of being waterlogged,

<sup>1</sup> Fishing with the dry fly downstream is usually called "drifting the fly." It is tried only when the angler cannot get into a position suitable for casting the fly just above the rising trout, or where a bad "drag" defeats an upstream cast. To drift properly in clear water when trout are big and wary is a most hard and delicate process. It was for this reason probably that my friend, Frederick Pigou, so greatly delighted and excelled in killing heavy fish by drifting the dry fly.—June 1910.

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the dry-fly angler takes it from the river, and dries it by what may be roughly described—I do not believe that the thing can be well described on paper—as a waving backwards and forwards of the rod in the air and over the shoulders. When a harsh wind is at one's back, and eyed hooks are not being used,<sup>1</sup> this drying, which must be repeated after every cast, is sometimes excellent from the point of view of the maker of artificial flies. If the angler returns the rod too hastily after the wave backwards, the line has a way of suddenly doubling over, and then it is that the tyro is surprised to hear a sharp little crack which he presently recognises as a sure sign the fly has 'gone. The salmon fisherman, too, occasionally hears a somewhat similar sound, and knows what it means when rough stones and rocks are within easy range at his back. Still, whether the hooks be eyed, or whether the flies be tied on gut—which only a few dry-fly

<sup>1</sup> But now (June 1910) we all use eyed hooks.

anglers still use and prefer—the thing must be gone through, and gone through thoroughly, for unless the fly be dry it will never cock up properly—that is, never sit up on the water, its wings erect, like the insects of the *Ephemeridae* family, which are chiefly imitated for this branch of angling.

Here, then, are three radical differences between the two methods. Old method—several flies, always wet, usually downstream; new method—one fly, always dry, nearly always upstream. But there is an even more vital distinction to my mind than any of these—that conveyed in the expressions “fishing the stream” and “fishing the rise.” The dry-fly fisherman chooses a fish and tries to deceive it, as a gunner chooses a partridge out of a covey and shoots at that bird alone. He picks his fish often out of several which are rising within sight and easy range, as the gunner picks his bird instead of firing into “the brown.” It is an interesting sight to see a good sportsman mark down,

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follow up, and bag a brace or a couple of brace of birds which have scattered themselves in a little field of clover-heads or mustard.<sup>1</sup> With what entire absence of fluster he covers the ground and brings down, stone dead, each bird as it rises, never hurrying, and yet getting to work without the loss of a minute! But this is not so good as the sight of the perfect dry-fly fisherman, who, having marked several good trout rising within a short radius, picks them up one by one in the masterful style, where an inferior hand would probably in playing the first scare the others.

The dry-fly fisherman must strive to hold the glass to Nature. It may be said that his success, or want of success, depends almost entirely on the accuracy, or want of accuracy, with which he imitates her. In the crystal-clear and quiet-flowing waters, where the method is adopted, good trout are so astute and

<sup>1</sup> But the driven partridge gives far finer sport than the walked-up bird.—June 1910.

fastidious that they will not as a rule have anything to do with an artificial fly unless it floats—or, to use the technical expression, “sails”—down the stream, just as the natural fly, hatched in the water, does. This is the simple reason why the wet or sunk fly is usually so hopeless on regular dry-fly streams. The theory—a plausible one—is that the wet or sunk fly is taken by fish because they suppose it a dead or dying natural insect. But it may be asked, does a dead or dying insect of the order of, say, the fragile *Ephemeridae*, become immersed beneath the water, and so be carried down or across stream with a series of little jerks? Is there any fly fisherman and close observer of the life and habits of the water insects who can say that this is, in his experience, a common event in Nature? We all have seen a dead dun on the water, and a certain proportion of these and other small insects do sink and get carried downstream. Yet the proportion is very small, and, though the spent gnat—the

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once succulent May-fly in its last and emaciated condition — seems to be a favourite morsel with big trout at times, I believe that a drowned and sodden dun is the sort of carrion at which a good trout would usually decline entirely. Besides, the dead small fly does not travel across and down stream as does the fly of the downstream fisherman. I am getting, however, into deep water, as all anglers are who question why shyest trout are on some waters so easily imposed on by the sunk fly, which is often not even winged (hackle flies are preferred by some wet-fly anglers to flies with wings), and darts backwards and forwards under the surface of the stream in an odd fashion, seeing it is supposed to be dead or dying.

On the contrary, there is no doubt why the wary trout takes the dry and cocked fly as it floats over him. He rises and sucks it in because he takes it to be one of those natural flies he has noticed sailing down for a while past, and has been feeding on. Had that fly not been

deftly cast by the dry-fly angler on the water a foot or so from him, and allowed to float down without jerk or movement, save what the gentle stream imparted; had any bit of the line come well within the vision of the feeding trout; had the gut been too coarse, or had it suddenly flashed in the sunlight; had a shadow from the top of the rod been seen—there would have been a wave instead of that longed-for dimple, that tightening on the line a delicious moment later, and that rod bent double! Be sure the trout would have ended his meal and fled to some dark and sheltered spot. In dry-fly talk he would have been scared.

. . . . .

I have roughly sketched in this chapter the action of the wet-fly fisherman; how upon arrival at the river-side he fits up his rod, puts on his cast of flies, and gets straight to work, whether or no there are fish rising and natural flies on the water. It will be well to give a few pictures of the dry-fly fisherman at work, and see

him "spot" a rise, stalk his fish, hook and land it.

The dry-fly angler is not as a rule a very early riser. He can do nothing without natural fly; and in my experience there are very few duns or other water-flies out till nine or even ten o'clock in the morning. If he is "on the water" by nine he is perhaps inclined to pride himself on his early hours. The first thing which the angler looks out for when he reaches the water is a rising fish. He may get his rod and tackle ready ere he has seen the first rise of the day, but save for the moistening the gut and straightening it out, he will not wet his line till he wets it over a feeding trout. As a consequence, when fish have not yet begun to rise owing to the absence of fly on the water, it is common enough to hear one angler who may have been out an hour say to another, "I have not wetted my line so far." True, there are very keen fishermen who, when there is nothing doing, will put a dry fly over any likely-



looking place, as the wet-fly angler casts his line on suitable bits of the stream ; but they usually do it in a casual manner, recognising that one cannot fish on chance and at the same time keep an eye on a hundred yards of stream. The dry-fly fisherman who is devoted to his sport moves very quietly up or down stream out of sight of the fish, and with the point of his rod well down—for he knows well that the sight of the rod is quite enough, where the banks of the stream are without trees and other cover, to scare fish. To the untutored eye he seems a mere loiterer, who only carries a rod for show. But, really, he rarely lifts his eyes from the water. His one absorbing wish is to “spot” a rising trout. For such a trout he looks, not in the middle of the stream, which the beginner may think the most promising place, but right under the banks, and at bends and little bays, into which the water being driven curls round and forms eddies and currents that run for a few feet or yards in an

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opposite direction to that of the stream. It is here, in these corners neglected by too many, that the angler searches most for his trout, always keeping the while at a respectful distance from their lairs.

But, see! what holds that sauntering angler whom you have noticed hanging about this half-hour or so with apparently no more energy in him than sufficed to light and gently draw at his pipe? The whole demeanour of the man has changed. He is keenly interested about something which is happening at that sharp bend a little farther down stream; yet instead of going straight to the place and satisfying himself that it is a fish, he makes a detour, going fully ten yards out into the meadow, then returning to the stream and taking up a kneeling position at twenty yards below the spot that holds him so. For a minute he is motionless, intently gazing at the water as it curls round the bend on his own side of the stream. Then he crawls on hands and knees for a few yards, and for

the first time brings his rod into play. What does it mean? Why, this—he thought he saw a rise at the bend under the bank, so instantly came down to get well behind his fish, then knelt down to “spot” a second tiny dimple, and thus assure himself as to the exact position of the rising trout. He has been stalking his trout, a process which requires much care and stealthy crouching movements at this point since the banks are bare of cover. Had the angler walked erect to his present position he would have scared the trout and “set it down”—frightened it off its meal for an hour or more. He is now as near to the trout as he dare be, and he makes a series of casts in the air. Clearly this cannot be to dry the fly, because the line has not been in the water for half an hour. No; it is to measure the distance, because if the first cast were made with ill judgment, and the line rather than the fly presented to the fish, the end might be a scared instead of a hooked trout. At length, after all this

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preparation, the angler lets his line shoot straight out, and the fly alights on the water six inches above the spot where the two dimples have been seen. How can he judge so nicely, seeing that the water is ever moving, and even changing slightly in appearance as it flows? He can judge to an inch because he has noted that the dimples were exactly opposite, or immediately below or above, some blade of grass, or herb, which he has marked at the water's edge. The fly, having softly alit on the stream, sails down like the natural flies which are now hatching in small numbers. After it has floated down six inches towards the angler, there comes the third dimple; next moment the rod is beautifully bent, and some line whirs off the reel with a music entrancing to the angling ear. The angler is on his feet now, and—never dropping the point of his rod, save when the fish leaps clean out of the water—is getting his net ready after the first rush is over. Within two minutes from the

time that third dimple appeared the first trout of the day is grassed, a beauty of a pound and a half in weight, and well fed, as fish taken at this bend always seem to be. You may approach now and admire the fish, and note the fly—a light olive dun—that at the first cast tempted the wary one. Before the feat the angler would have protested had you come too near.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Commonly after a neat piece of work and a success an angler is very approachable, and open to a little flattery. A few summers since a good fish took up its feeding quarters within a dozen yards of Dorothy Bridge, at Haddon Hall, in a little backwash, which was almost completely cut off from the stream by a large bough that had fallen from an elm tree and fixed itself in the bed of the stream. The place was not more than a yard broad by two yards long, and the trout lay at the head, where a tiny stream trickled in. It needed some nicety to cast to the fish, as the foliage of the fallen bough on one side and the herbage of the bank on the other were rather hard to avoid; it was shallow water, too, and the fish very wary. Several men came and cast a little, but went away, saying that it was a hopeless place, and that even if the fish were hooked he must rush into the boughs and smash all. One quiet evening, however, I came down and assailed the trout for certainly the twelfth time. He had the fly in a moment, and dashed into the bough. I waited, expecting the smash, but, strangely, it never came. Instead, the fish chose to come back again with a great to-do, the most astonishing part of the thing being the way in which the gut got clear of the twigs, first one and then another,

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without the least aid. Once he was in his lair, I made short work of the fish and he lay on the bank in less than a minute, as golden-hued and crimson-spotted a trout as you could desire to see, turning the scale at  $1\frac{1}{4}$  lbs. Two artists hard by had been sketching the old bridge, and they ran up in time to see the end. Said one of them, "I thought something had happened by the noise"; and he added, "What a splendid tench!"

## CHAPTER III

### A NOT UNEQUAL CONTEST

THE rough sketch in the last chapter of an angler taking the first trout of the day, will serve to show that the capture of a fish by the dry-fly method is quite a little drama in itself. The trout had first to be "spotted," then stalked, exactly located, and finally tempted by the well-delivered first cast of a single dry, floating, and cocked imitation of the natural fly on the finest of gut. Here all went right. The exact position of the fish was ascertained, and the stalk, though needing care and the use of knees as well as hands, was simple enough to an accomplished angler. Then the fish was evidently well on the rise—not taking a fly casually, and for

the next ten minutes leaving half a dozen flies to float over him untouched. There was no current to cause a drag; no difficult wind to drown the fly, or prevent its being neatly offered to the trout; whilst, to cap all, the trout took well and was safely hooked. If everything always, or even often, went so well, the trout would stand but a very poor chance against the cunning angler. Fortunately for the fish, and for the angler too—though one is not wont to look on the matter in this philosophic light at the moment of failure—it is not so. It is on the whole no unequal contest between trout and man, and with big wary fish in awkward places the odds are well against the rod, however skilled the hand that directs it. There are many little things in dry-fly fishing constantly against the angler, which help to make the sport so absorbing. Dry-fly fishing, like the game of chess, becomes more engrossing as he who practises it grows more scientific and learns the openings and many variations. If there



is the slightest sign of fish taking—a rise or two in an hour—the angler thinks nothing of remaining by the river-side from half an hour after breakfast till long past the late dinner hour. More than once in May-fly season a little band of anglers, among them myself, might have been found sitting down to dinner in the coffee-room at the Rutland Arms, Bakewell, at ten o'clock—a dinner which had been kept hot since eight! Moreover, I well remember that one season, when this happened several times, there was scarcely a trout killed with May-fly by half a dozen rods, the fish declining the winged insect and gorging instead on the *larvae*. Many's the time I have heard Bakewell Church clock strike eight—the hour at which I had ordered dinner—and yet gone on casting over a trout at the Rookery, or farther down stream toward old Haddon, though barely to see the fly on the water in the feeble light was a strain on the sharpest eye; this after ten hours' hard work with the rod. Hard

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work is no exaggerated term to apply to dry-fly fishing practised with such thoroughness as this. It is not merely the exertion of drying the fly, which at times will blister the hand like rowing or sculling, that has to be taken into account, but the intense concentration needed in looking out for rises, and in assailing a trout in an awkward place.

. . . . .

All went well with the angler who killed his trout in the last chapter : it was all straightforward. He might not have been so soon successful, if successful at all, had he, instead of fishing his own bank, been forced to attack the trout from the other side of the river. In some ways fishing across is preferable to fishing right up stream. I find that the fly usually cocks up better in fishing across, nor does one need to be so careful in stalking. One often fishes across, kneeling from habit rather than necessity, a trout stream of moderate size like the Wye at Bakewell or the Dove in Dove-

dale. But in fishing one's own bank it is generally necessary to kneel, and to show no more of the rod than one can help. Trout, as many anglers, wet and dry fly alike, will allow, appear at times and in certain lights to see almost as easily behind as in front. But I have cast again and again to a trout directly opposite, and at a narrow part of the river too, feeling sure all the time that he must see me, and yet I have ended by hooking him. But what a cruel thing is that which has been well named the "drag"! To see a keen angler striving long and earnestly to come to terms with a wary trout on the opposite side of the stream, and being baffled at every cast by the drag—and it is usually when casting across that the drag is worst—is as the sight of a good man struggling with adversity. The drag is quite a modern discovery. Walton and Cotton probably never dreamt of it, and it may be safe to assume that it was not noticed till the dry fly grew to be a

recognised and distinct branch of angling. Many people have written about it, and codes of rules have been drawn up by following which the angler is advised that he may minimise its ill effects. I incline to think, however, that the drag must always be with us. There are two distinct causes that result in drag, the flow of the water and the blow of the wind, and the effect in both is the same—the setting-down of the trout, or at least his refusal to take the artificial fly.

A trout is rising freely right under the opposite bank, taking every fly that sails within a foot of him. There is no reason to think he will decline your perfect imitation if it be presented naturally to him. He has taken up his position in one of those gentle little streams, which always seem the very places down which to float a dry fly. You present your fly to him dry as dry, and the moment it alights on the water it cocks up, so perfect in its mockery of the live insects that you may easily yourself mistake it

for one of these. Ah, the trout sees it all right; look, he comes to it open-mouthed almost, would miss it on no account! But before he can seize the fly it is pulled over and rudely away downstream. The cause is this. The stream, being more rapid in the middle than where the trout is rising, gets a firm grip of the line almost immediately it touches the water, and pulls it along much faster than the artificial fly is travelling in a less powerful current. Of course, directly this drag reaches the fly, and it does so very quickly, it carries the fly rudely away from the fish, and takes all the cockiness out of it. When trout are at all wary this drag decides them not to take the fly, and where they are what one may call over-educated it often sets them down. It is not hard for any one, who has closely studied the movements of trout in clear streams, to understand the offence a wary fish will take at the appearance of a dragged fly. Trout do not like even the natural

insect to play pranks on the water. It is common to see a fish back downstream closely attending a fluttering olive dun for several feet, almost touching the insect with its nose the while, and yet ultimately decline to take it. The dragged artificial fly, however, is so unlike anything in Nature that the only wonder is a trout in fair condition, and above the size of a fingerling, ever takes it — a thing which does occur perhaps once in a thousand casts. It does not speak very well for the grayling that he does often take the dragged fly, and even prefer it to the fly sailing down properly, at a time when he is actually feeding on the natural fly. Mr. Senior and many other good men have a high opinion of the grayling as a sporting fish, and fight in his own peculiar style he truly can, which convicts Cotton of complete error when he says that the grayling is the “deadest-hearted” of fish; but it is poor sport, I think, to angle for grayling with the dry fly. I have

never killed a grayling on the Test or the Itchen, where they run very big; but on the Wye—a noted north-country stream for the grayling—he is not esteemed at a high price by the dry-fly angler.<sup>1</sup> He there prefers gaudy “flies” known as claret bumbles and such like, worked on the wet-fly method, to the neatest pattern of the olive dun that can be got for love or money. Often the grayling will take the dry fly, and on bright, hot days take it freely; but he is spasmodic, apt to prefer a bungling to a clever cast, and he is often caught when out of condition and season, so he has a good many detractors. A grayling thoroughly out of condition is a quite disgusting object, and it is when grayling are in this state—black, and oozing with a nasty milky matter—that they are most likely to rise well at the fly, like a trout.<sup>2</sup> Some people affect to be able always

<sup>1</sup> Since this was written I have taken a good many grayling on the river Test, one of  $2\frac{3}{4}$  lbs., but I do not much care for them.—June 1910.

<sup>2</sup> I was writing of the Derbyshire Wye grayling.—June 1910.

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to discriminate between the rise of a trout and the rise of a grayling. Commonly the rise of the grayling is unmistakable to even a beginner. A good trout seems to rise as though he were fearful lest a dry-fly angler might be lurking close to his lair, watching for a ring of a feeding fish. He dimples, or sometimes draws in the fly with gentlest suck, which leaves no ring at all, but merely sends up a little bubble that floats down without leaving any sign of where the fish exactly lies. As a rule, the rise of sizable trout is more dignified and leisurely in dry-fly waters than that of the grayling. The grayling does not, like the trout,<sup>1</sup> when feeding on flies, station itself close to the top of the water, but instead he hovers about several feet below the surface, and comes up almost straight with a "bang," at the natural or artificial fly passing over him. This, however, is not perceptible to the

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, however, trout come up at the fly from the bed of the stream. I have noticed this on several streams, notably on the Hampshire Lyde lately.—June 1910.



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angler fishing with a long line across or up stream, nor with a short line where the water is deep and the light cheating. Often one may angle for an hour or more for what seems, both from rise and position, a big trout, and in the end hook an eight-inch grayling, or a sizable one in shocking condition.

. . . . .  
To return to the drag. Water is the usual cause of it, but sometimes a harsh wind will prove quite as evil. A furious gust down, up, or across stream knocks over your fly, seizes the line and gut alighting on the stream, and carries them just where it chooses. To do anything here, save try to keep equable and refrain from vows to bundle all your fishing-tackle into the cupboard on return home and give up angling, is futile. But there are one or two ways of dealing with the ordinary drag caused by a sharp stream between yourself and the trout, which come instinctively to every angler after a little experience. Sometimes instead of

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fishing across or up, where the drag is inevitable, the dry fly may be "drifted" downstream. In this way the drag is avoided, because the fly has a good start of the line, and is not under its influence. Another way is to have a little loose line, and immediately the fly is on the water to pay this out, at the same time lowering the point of the rod even to the surface of the stream. By such a manoeuvre the line in the water is prevented for a few seconds from getting taut, and the fly is not turned over and pulled down quite so soon. There are often to be seen fine backwaters on dry-fly streams that can only be fished from the bank opposite the one under which they are situated, and fished across an exceedingly sharp stream. Here large trout cruise leisurely at the surface, their fins well-nigh out of water as they collect the fresh-hatched olive duns, and as soon would they look at a dragged fly as at a fishing-bag. Hours is one sometimes tempted to spend in such spots, casting and casting, on the

remote chance of one of these fish taking the fly the moment it falls on the water, and before the irresistible stream carries it away. In such fastnesses of the river the trout are always most hearty feeders. They haunt these places for the sake of taking flies, and it is amusing to notice the way they gather up the duns which are washed thither in numbers during the hatch. Could one only get a fly well to one of these inaccessible trout, it would be taken without suspicion, and in the quiet orderly manner that marks such fish ; but it is impossible.

The drag is one of the greatest protections in rather fast-running streams that Nature affords the trout against the dry-fly fisherman. But there are many other difficulties, which, if not so constant as the drag, are frequent, and they serve to make the contest between man and fish evenly matched. In wet-fly fishing wind is not necessarily bad for the angler. Many wet-fly streams give good sport on rainy, boisterous days, and with some, as

the little Barle of Exmoor, the trout rarely take so well as during a snowstorm. I have seen fly hatching in considerable quantities, and trout rising fast at it, during a driving storm of snow and sleet on a raw April day ; and fish rising steadily on an almost equally bitter day in May with a north-easter lashing the water at exposed spots into miniature waves. Constant practice, a cool temper, a weighty line, a good rod and a short one, will materially aid the angler to fish across or even in the teeth of a wind like this. But it is not heartening work. One must constantly be losing sight of the fly on the disturbed surface of the water, and there can be nothing like accuracy. Nor is this the kind of weather when we much like kneeling and crawling about in the grass. The bag of trout on dry-fly streams on roaring days is commonly a very moderate one.

The ideal day for dry-fly fishing is a windless, or almost windless, day. The dry-fly fisherman does not want to see a

ripple on the water. He relies, or should rely, on deceiving the trout by other means. Sometimes a very slight wind, a series of little puffs, or a mere draught, proves as sure a spoil-sport as a gale. It prevents one getting the fly with nice finish to a trout rising in a shallow place where the smallest mistake arouses suspicions. The gut falls on the water with the fly and a foot of the cast doubled back, and off goes the trout as scared as though a boulder had been flung at him. It is in the defeat of these difficulties of wind that the finely tapering line and gut-cast, and a line perfectly adapted to the rod, are indispensable. A line too light or a line too heavy for the rod will make the angler feel that he must be the clumsiest hand at casting, whereas he is only suffering from defects in his gear. As I have said I have little faith in the power of fine tackle to make a fine fisherman ; but it is not well to grudge time and trouble on getting well suited with rod and line, which can usually be best done

by studying the matter for oneself at the river-side. I have often been forced to fish without a nicely tapering gut-cast through breakages which had to be roughly repaired on the bank, and often in the least possible time when they occurred in the midst of a good rise of fish. The difference here is nearly always felt where a long cast is necessary, or where the wind is very adverse, the more so if one has been fishing for some while past with a perfect tapering cast.

Comparatively few anglers are either-handed, yet to be able to fish dry fly with left as well as right, and the reverse, is most useful. The back-handed cast is usually made by right-handed anglers to do service for the left, but sometimes it is futile. Take an angler who wants to get at a fish rising right under his own bank, when of course the natural hand to grasp the rod is the one nearest the stream. Well, in this instance the *stream hand* is the left. There is a vicious little wind blowing, which tends

to get hold of the fly and carry it with a portion of the cast clean back on to the bank. The either-handed angler uses his left arm—or rather wrist, by which casting should be done—and gets the fly to his fish right enough.<sup>1</sup> The angler who cannot use his left has to try a back-handed cast, often effective, but here useless. The fly is swept back on to the bank at each cast, until it presently catches the stem of some obstinate water herb, or gets fixed in the ground, and there must be a breakage or a scared fish. Occasionally it is possible to crawl to the spot where the fly has caught, and stretching out one arm cautiously grope about—raising the head would scare the fish—till the hook is found and set free. But the try seems hardly worthy of the trouble, when one knows that even if it be successful, the fly will get fast again within the next few casts. The ease with which a fish-hook attaches itself firmly to things

<sup>1</sup> I am left-handed in golf, cricket, and croquet, and helpless with the right ; right-handed in shooting, billiards, angling (with one hand), and helpless with the left.

other than trout is remarkable. When left to dangle from the point of the rod, as the angler leisurely moves along searching for rises, it has a way of burying itself into the back of the coat, and the back of the trousers or knickerbockers, out of which it has to be cut with scissors. But this is nothing. Most anglers can tell how they have hooked a cow, pig, or dog. I have seen a keen angler hook himself in the lip, and, not being able to extract the hook, cut off the gut attached to it, and fish on till the end of the day, when he went to a doctor, who lanced it out. As the season advances, and vegetation grows denser, the hook is very apt to seize hold of one of the myriad bents which flourish in the meadows before the tall mowing grass has gone down before the scythe. In casting from the knees it is next to impossible to avoid catching a stiff bent or grass-head now and then. The gut, too, will get entangled in the grass and the water-plants in an exasperating way. But what are these trifles to set against



the delight of angling in a placid, crystal stream in the unbounded wealth of summer? To be out in the fields at such a season, far from the dusty roadside, from the fever of city life, is a great thing; to be angling then is to be blest. "I never see," wrote Howitt in his *Rural Life of England*, "a clear stream running through the fields at this beautiful time of year, but I wish, like old Izaak Walton, to take rod and line and a pleasant book and away into some sylvan or romantic region, and give myself up wholly to the influence of the season; to angle, and read, and dream by the ever-lapsing water, in green and flowery meadows, for days and weeks, caring no more for all that is going on in this great and many-coloured world than if there was no world at all beyond . . . truly that good old man had hit on one of the ways to true enjoyment of life." Howitt had in him the true instinct of an angler. As for the book it would only have been for show. The sunlight glancing on the water and

piercing the deep shade of the sycamores and oaks by the stream is too much for print.

In the contest between the dry-fly fisherman and the trout, sunshine is one of the things which by no means necessarily tells in favour of the fish. With stained and very fine gut you can often kill fish more easily even in the full glare of the day than on a dull day when a nasty wind is blowing downstream. Bright sun is necessarily bad for the angler only when it stops the hatch of fly. In the hottest hours of a burning summer day there is not much hatch of fly, and the fish stir little ; but if there is fly, which the fish are feeding on, a cloudless sky need not discourage the angler. I recollect fishing the Lathkill on perhaps the hottest day on which I have ever handled a rod, though it was well before midsummer. At about two o'clock it was nearly intolerable in the narrow valley, yet some fish rose, and then only during the day. With the dry fly I hooked and

landed four good trout, which all rose well and fearlessly in water very low, crystal-clear, and with little current.<sup>1</sup> There seem to be lights in which it is harder to stalk and deceive a trout than in the dazzling sun. Angling one bright day towards the end of May in the Ver, a few miles from St. Albans, I made some experiments, as there was not a rise to be seen all the afternoon, with a view to learn how near I could approach big trout lying in mid-stream, or near it, without scaring them. By moving very gently, almost imperceptibly, I was able to come to the very edge of the stream immediately opposite the fish, and within three yards, or thereabouts, apparently without being observed. The power of the sun was intense, enabling me, though the Ver water is not quite of the clearest, to see with ease every weed at the

<sup>1</sup> “April 12, 1814.—Longparish. Went out fly fishing, and notwithstanding a bright sun the whole time I in a few hours killed thirty-six trout. N.B.—My flies were (what I always use) the yellow dun at bottom and red palmer bob.” (From *Colonel Hawker's Diary*.)

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bottom of the stream; nor was there any cover to speak of. The trout on this stretch of the Ver run very large, rarely take a small dry fly, and do not commonly take any fly till dusk; but had they been inclined to feed that afternoon I certainly ought not to have found the difficulty of deceiving them in the brilliant sunshine insuperable. May it not be that the trout's eye, like the angler's, is liable to be dazzled by the sun, or were these fish asleep?

Provided you can get the dry fly neatly to the trout, and the trout is feeding, you need not greatly concern yourself whether the light is dull or dazzling, whether the wind is east, north, south, or west. This may seem rather startling and heterodox to some anglers whose creed is that of the old school, which held that east wind or brilliant sunlight were always bad, and south wind and cloudy day always good. It is certain that the most promising-looking days often turn out the least productive

in dry-fly fishing, and the least promising the most productive.<sup>1</sup>

But there is a certain atmospheric condition which seems to tell against all methods of fly fishing alike. We have all experienced this condition, and have felt that whilst it continues there is little chance of good sport. Mr. Halford has described it thus:—"Now what is a *bad light*? It is when the entire hemisphere of the sky is of one heavy, grey dull leaden colour; when the very light itself seems to have become imbued with this sad leaden tinge; when the water appears unnaturally clear, probably from its contrast with the dull grey tint of all its surroundings; when every object in the water, whether trout or grayling, whether banks of green weed or patches of light, clean gravel between the weeds, is distinctly visible from an extreme distance. Such a day in early spring is cold, and in summer and autumn is oppressive, sultry,

<sup>1</sup> On the Lyde this year (1910) I found trout in May and June rising very well on the brightest, hottest hours, and fly—a small watery dun—hatching well too.

and productive of headache and other *malaise* in human beings; and on such a day I have never seen a good hatch of duns, nor do I ever remember on such a day good sport to have fallen to my lot or to that of any other angler on the same stream." He adds that probably such a day is almost invariably a precursor of a change in the weather, and that fish seem always to cease feeding at the first signs of such a change, and to wait until the change has passed before feeding again. And yet I should not care to guarantee that the fish would wait if on such a day a hatch of fly were to take place. The rise of trout depends on the hatch of fly.

The difficulties I have spoken of, the drag and fishing against an adverse wind, are far from being the only ones that in the contest between angler and trout tell in the trout's favour. There are the trout's habits—known too well to every dry-fly fisherman who has had a season's experience—of "tailing," "bulging," "rising

short," and "smutting," with which I will deal later. Then, too, the fineness of the gut always used by good dry-fly fishermen is greatly in favour of the fish when a three or four pound trout has been successfully stalked, deceived, and hooked, in a place abounding with snags and dangerous bushes that overhang the water. "Oh me, look you, Master, a fish, a fish ; oh ! 'las ! Master, I have lost her !" exclaims *Venator*, in a breath, in the *Compleat Angler* ; to whom *Piscator*, with just a suspicion of self-assurance, replies—"Ay, marry, sir, that was a good fish indeed ; and if I had had the luck to have taken up that rod, then 'tis twenty to one he should not have broke my line by running to the rod's end as you have suffered him : I would have held him within the bent of my rod (unless he had been fellow to the great *Trout* that is near an ell long, which was of such length and depth that he had his picture drawn, and now is to be seen at mine Host Rickabies at the George in

Ware).” Twenty to one would be dangerous odds to lay on an angler against a three-pounder, or a two-pounder, in some of the Wye backwashes. How often has it been my fortune to hook a good fish of under two pounds, after many fruitless attempts, only to lose him a few seconds after striking! With a frantic rush he has fled to some stronghold under a great root, or in snags and dense weeds, and smashed the fine gut as though it were no stronger than a single horsehair. In awkward places the odds, I incline to think, are usually on the fish, if he be heavy and in good condition, for besides the danger of a smash there is always a great danger of an entanglement that frees the fish from the fly, unless he happen to be very firmly hooked. After some experience, the angler can often tell intuitively whether or not a fish is firmly hooked, but it sometimes happens that the trout, completely played out, drops off the fly and sinks into the depths, even as the



landing-net is put in the water. It is remarkable that, however dead-beat he seem, a trout always has just enough energy left to avail himself instantly of this mishap, and depart before the net has enclosed him. A series of instantaneous photographs of the angler's face and attitude at these moments would add something to the gaiety of gaiety. Mr. Bromley Davenport, in *Sport*, gave an account of the struggle of his life with a huge Norwegian salmon, which dropped off the hook and rolled feebly away into the depths at the moment the gillie was stretching out the gaff. The man was as if paralysed by the mishap, else even after the salmon was unhooked he might have gaffed it. Though I have always "stretched lame hands" at such a time, I have never come near recovering a trout that has been freed from the hook. Probably there are very few people who can say that they have landed a trout after the hold of the hook has given, though it may be different as to coarse

fish. Salmon may no doubt be sometimes secured after the hold of the hook has given, by a dexterous use of the gaff in shallow water.

The greatest difficulty the dry-fly fisherman has to contend against is after all neither the drag nor the wind; neither the habits of the trout known as tailing, cursing or smutting, and rising short, nor the snags and weeds which break the gut; but the extreme distaste with which the trout so often regards the lures of the angler, resemble they never so closely a trout's natural food. We hear a great deal in these dry-fly days about the education of the trout, and when two or three anglers gather very likely they begin and end with this topic. That the trout of to-day in the Test, Itchen, and Derbyshire Wye—to name three most famous streams—are much more difficult to entice with an artificial fly than they were three-quarters of a century, half a century, nay, a quarter of a century ago, really does not admit of question. Take

the first of these streams, and examine some of the extracts from the diary of that rare old sportsman, Colonel Hawker of Longparish. The Colonel's fame is that rather of a shooter than an angler, but all-round, hard-bitten sportsman that he was he could fish with the best of them, and only laid aside the gun to handle the rod. Here are some fishing notes from his diary that give us a good idea of how Test trout behaved a hundred years ago :—

*“April 15, 1814.—28 trout.*

*“April 16.—24 trout (average weight 1 lb. each, and many weighed  $1\frac{1}{2}$  lbs.). Also a great many fair-sized ones which I threw in. I had all this admirable sport in less than two hours and a half. . . . In the evening I was ludicrously amused with throwing a fly on horse-back, which answers as well as on foot.*

*“April 18.—15 trout.*

*“April 23.—21 trout.*

*“April 26.—16 trout.*

*“April 27.—12 trout.*

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“*April 28.*—13 trout. Average weight,  $1\frac{1}{4}$  lbs. each fish.

“*April 29.*—14 trout.

“*April 30.*—17 trout, which make up in eleven days’ angling 100 brace.”

The Colonel, it is to be noted, was in the habit of putting back everything under  $\frac{3}{4}$  lb. Nineteen years later the Test fishing seems in no way to have deteriorated, to judge by an entry in his diary that tells of a fishing expedition with two gentlemen who had “unexpectedly popped in.” In a little over four hours the three rods made a total bag of a hundred fish. Further, on September 9, 1837, the Colonel had a “most glorious bit of sport.” The first three fish he landed scaled  $6\frac{1}{2}$  lbs., and in all he brought home 22 fish. “I was about four hours at it, and left the water when they were taking like bull-dogs, because I thought it a shame to kill more than I knew what to do with.”

Now Colonel Hawker fished, as may be gathered from an extract already

quoted, with a couple of wet flies, "yellow dun at bottom and red palmer bob," which I am rather disposed to think might be only effectual at Longparish to-day in setting down a number of rising trout, even if attached to gut much finer than was used in those times. Moreover, fancy fly fishing in the Test nowadays from horseback! As for the bags, they sound almost fabulous to Test fishermen of to-day, if we assume the fish were in anything like good condition; though it should be added that in May-fly seasons even at the present time some fine dishes of trout are made by good fishermen.

Within more recent times a bag of ten brace of good trout on the Derbyshire Wye out of May-fly season was not at all an astonishing feat; and in the days when this bag was a fairly ordinary one amongst skilful anglers—say a dozen or fifteen years since<sup>1</sup>—the

<sup>1</sup> This was written in 1896. To-day one has to go back twenty-five or thirty years to find frequent records of such bags as these.—June 1910.

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dry-fly method was yet but in its infancy on this beautiful stream. Wet-fly anglers could then make a good enough bag on most favourable days, instead of hooking, as they would do now, perhaps one sizable trout, a brace or so of grayling, and a number of sprats which of course go back. The lower Wye, when first I knew it, was deteriorating rapidly, owing largely to the way in which it was being over-fished, and because the stock of trout was not kept up enough. It has now decidedly recovered, and during the last season or two they who know how to use the dry fly well have enjoyed something like the sport which was to be had there in past times.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is not to be supposed that rods were very rare in times when ten brace was a possible bag on a good day on this length of the Wye. I have seen a little book containing some sort of record of the

<sup>1</sup> Thus a friend wrote to me from Bakewell during present season (1896), "Have had good sport considering low and clear water, and that it is the eve of the May-fly—29 brace in 6 days."

number of rods, day by day, on the Bakewell length, at a period when the dry fly had never been heard of in Derbyshire or elsewhere, and it shows that the place was then popular with fishermen. Before there was a railway station at Bakewell there were anglers and to spare. The Rutland Arms in those times laid itself out to entertain anglers who came thither year after year, and, what is more, killed trout. Shenstone, had he lived later, might have been thinking of this solid, homely old hostelry when he wrote the famous lines—

Whoe'er has travelled life's dull round,  
Where'er his stages may have been,  
May sigh to think he still has found  
The warmest welcome at an inn.

So far as I can gather, anglers came and went in a pretty steady stream to Bakewell even from the time of which Colonel Hawker's diary tells, and got sport, though it should be noted that during the May-fly time they angled with the natural fly—as is done on the Dove at

the present time—and probably, when the spirit moved them, did not hesitate to resort freely to baits other and grosser than the natural fly, that if used even now would be deadly enough. Whether these ten-brace men of old time killed their fish with wet fly in the backwashes is quite another question. I should certainly say that a trout in condition would have scarcely looked at a wet or dragged fly in a backwater fifty years ago; but this will be regarded as a lesser matter, a side issue, by those who wish to see some light shed on the question whether or not the trout to-day are wiser fish than their ancestors. Colonel Hawker and old Wye hands still living are not the only witnesses that the bags of yore on Hampshire and Derbyshire waters were, despite the want of science in the method of angling, heavier than those of to-day. The same tale is told by many other anglers about many other waters. It is true we must sometimes make allowances for a pleasant



tendency on the part of those well advanced in years to colour the long past with a rosy tint. Again, it is well to bear in mind that every angler begins the day an optimist, but that many end it pessimists. Their expectations have not been realised, and it is then that they are inclined to lay mournful stress on the falling off in sport, and to make sad predictions as to the lot of the angler of fifty or a hundred years hence. Still, allowing for these things, and for such exaggerations as Colonel Hawker probably indulged in when in triumph he suggested it was as easy to kill Test fish on horseback as on foot, there is enough trustworthy testimony left to assure us that the trout on many waters do not rise to the fly so freely as they did in the past. I don't hesitate to say that this is so, for example, on the Test, the Itchen, the lower lengths of the Derbyshire Wye, and the Dove. On private lengths, on the other hand, of one or two of these streams, and in the

fine trouting waters of Hertfordshire—which both in the size and number of its trout, and the charming character of its streams, is in the front rank of English angling counties—where the stock has been well kept up, bags are probably about as good as ever, if fish are not quite so easily beguiled.

Now, what is the reason of this falling-off in bags—in other words, of this greater reluctance of the trout to take the fly? One theory is that the trout has gradually become, through its incessant pursuit by the angler, a wiser creature: that from the free riser and bold biter, which he was in Colonel Hawker's time, he has grown to be a suspicious fish, careful to examine most critically the artificial flies of the angler, and to reject those which do not exactly correspond with the natural ones. This intelligence, or education, as the dry-fly angler calls it, has been transmitted to him from his forefathers of generations back, who were in their day incessantly pursued by the anglers

and often pricked by his hooks. If this theory be correct the dry-fly angler is sharpening the wits not only of the trout he angles for, but of unborn generations of fish ; he is making a high order of intelligence hereditary in trout. In his *Animal Intelligence* Mr. G. T. Romanes writes : “ With reference to the general intelligence of fish, allusion may first be made to the marked increase of wariness in waters which are much fished. This shows no small degree of intelligence, for the caution is proved to be the result of observation by the fact that young trout under such circumstances are less wary than old ones.” Mr. Romanes, it will be clearly seen by this passage, does not believe in intelligence of a fish being handed down to its offspring. Sir Herbert Maxwell, writing lately on the subject of trout education, pointed out that the intelligence shown by a trout must be the result entirely of its own observation ; it could not, he urged, be transmitted, because the trout fry are not watched

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over and reared by their parents, as young birds and animals are. But does this in itself rebut the theory of education of the trout in our dry-fly streams having now become hereditary? Nor does Mr. Romanes seem to take up a very strong position when he asserts that, because young trout are less wary than old trout in much-fished streams, the intelligence of the latter is therefore the result of their own observation. Surely, however clever the young trout were born, he would not thoroughly develop in intelligence, any more than he would in body, until he had come to years of discretion.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is certain that trout are born exceedingly fearful. Long before they have become yearlings, when indeed they are in the inch or two inch fry stage, their shyness is extreme. I recollect being shown by Mr. Andrews, at Crichmere, several little ditches containing fresh running water. They were, he remarked, full of fry. Yet for some time not a single one could we see. After a while, on turning a short corner, we came upon a dozen or so of these mites, which fled with almost incredible rapidity, and hid their tiny selves in the weeds, or in the broken water underneath a miniature dam. Fry are indeed extremely alert little creatures. Were they otherwise, their chance of ever being a yearling would be very small, for trout are cannibals that, of course, make not the slightest distinction between

Still, whilst differing from the line of reasoning taken by Mr. Romanes and others, I should greatly hesitate before accepting the theory that the wariness and power of discrimination between natural and artificial flies now shown by trout has been acquired through heredity. It is safer, perhaps, to seek an explanation in such causes as the great increase in the number of fishermen, the want of water in many chalk streams where formerly there was commonly an abundance, the way in which mills are incessantly interfering with the flow of the water (thereby disturbing the trout and disinclining them to rise), the constant cutting of weeds and the netting of coarse fish (which also exercise a disturbing influence on the trout), possibly the stocking of streams with too many artificially reared yearlings, which have been fed in their ponds on chopped horse-meat instead of May-flies and March-browns, their own offspring and those of other fish. Like the little wood in *Maud*, the trout stream is "a world of plunder and prey."

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and, finally, the way in which the dry-fly fisherman chooses one trout, and assails it for perhaps hour after hour, and even day after day, and does not desist till he has either put it in his creel, or by pricking, or even playing it several times, made it for some time suspicious of anything in the form of a floating insect. It is somewhat of an irony that dry-fly fishing, which was first tried because it was the only sportsmanlike way of hooking shy fish in clear streams, is now to be regarded as one of the things which help to make the trout more wary than ever : it was the result of wariness in trout, and now is partly the cause.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCERNING BOTH GROSS AND AGGRAVATING FEEDERS

No complaint has been more rife amongst dry-fly anglers during the last few seasons than the dearth of natural fly on the water, and—as we have seen—in some clubs and subscription waters, the habit sizable trout have of not rising well at what duns there are. “No fly anywhere” is the report one hears in many places as to southern streams. This is not to be taken quite literally, but in a broad sense it is too often true. Our knowledge of water-fly life is so small that to discuss the causes of this shortness in the supply of duns—the last few seasons have seen the May-flies out in large quantities—is

but to grope in the dark. All we know for sure about the causes which make for a large or a meagre supply of the smaller members of the *Ephemeridae* family, is that we know next to nothing. This scarcity of duns in various streams is usually attributed to bad atmospheric conditions. But might not the dearth be sometimes due to causes other than this—to preventable causes, such as the incessant tampering with the bed of the stream and the cutting of weeds, which are encouraged on some waters? This constant raking of the river is not unlikely to interfere with fly life. Nature has a habit of resenting incessant interference with her methods by man. At any rate, this is a matter which owners of fisheries and members of club-waters might look into when they find themselves season after season woefully short of fly. The way in which weed-cutting is sometimes carried out is—quite apart from the question whether it affects the hatch of duns and other water-flies—most un-



scientific. Instead of lines and patches of green weed being left as hiding-places for the trout, and, I may add, for the shrimp and other creatures that are so good as fish food, the whole growth is often shorn away by the cutters. Anything more uninteresting than the bed of a clear stream after such a clearance can scarcely be imagined. Moreover, it wastes a great deal of water, that most precious thing on the southern chalk streams; for weeds, like dams, help to hold up the stream.

Dearth of fly is almost fatal to the dry-fly fisherman, though there can be such a thing as over-abundance of it. During the last few years of the existence of the Hungerford Fly Fishing Club, it fell to me each season to fish the water several times out of the May-fly season, and I found that it was practically useless trying the Kennet till the evening, when the sedge-fly began to appear. There was no hatch of fly in the daytime, and there were no rises to speak of. I used, there-

fore, to go to the Marsh Meadows, as the upper reaches of the delightful and pretty little stream, the Dun, are called. The Dun was happily left to itself more than the Kennet, it being a mere water of ease to the main stream. Some time during the day I generally found a little hatch of fly there, and killed a trout or two. The Dun in the Marsh Meadows is a most typical trout brook, such a brook as Tennyson had in mind perhaps when he wrote—

I murmur under moon and stars  
 In brambly wildernesses :  
 I linger by my shingly bars,  
 I loiter round my cresses.

In my favourite spot, where waders were not needed save after flood, there was not the least scrap of cover, not a rush, a thistle, nor a friendly fern, and the water was perfectly clear. One had to creep about on hands and knees, and even then keep at a good distance from the edge of the stream, which was almost without banks and extremely shallow. Prettier sport than that given by the little Dun





ON THE MID TEST.

would be hard to desire, and the fish I killed there were beauties, golden-hued, owing to the fine yellow gravel of which the bed of the stream is composed. At sunset I would return to the Kennet, and wait for the appearance of the sedge-fly.

It may be we shall at last discover that shortness of fly in the daytime is more or less preventable. But the disinclination the trout often shows to feeding on the duns, and the May-flies too, in the winged state, is what we cannot cure. There are three well-known and distinct habits of feeding trout, all of which are frequent, and all of which invariably prevent the filling of the angler's creel or bag. I give them somewhat in their order of demerit—"bulging," "tailing," and "smutting."

The "bulging" trout appears to the casual or uninformed angler an earnest, straightforward fish, taking winged flies of some kind or other. Accordingly, the angler sets to work drying and casting his

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fly to the trout with great hope which is only sensibly diminished when he discovers that the dainty fish will not deign to take the faintest notice of any of the many varieties of flies, hackled and winged, he chooses from his book and tries one after another. Finally, he leaves the trout after he has blistered his hand over it, and settles down with fresh confidence to a second fish which is rising boldly a few yards off. This second trout is as blind to the artificial duns, spinners, wickhams, quill gnats, and alder as was the first; and it often happens that the third, fourth, fifth, and indeed all the moving trout in the stream show equally bad taste. At dinner-time the beginner after such an experience tells us that there was a splendid rise of fish where he was angling, but that he, unfortunately, could not find out the right kind of fly: if only he had, he could have filled his creel without stirring more than fifty yards from one place. Do not be too severe with that tyro; remember that a bulging trout is

very like a fairly rising trout to all save the experienced angler, and that even he will now and then be imposed on for a few minutes when there is plenty of natural fly on the water.<sup>1</sup>

A trout is said to be bulging when taking the *nymphae* of the duns or May-flies just beneath the surface, and so just before they hatch out into the winged *subimago* state. To catch the fly before it reaches the surface and bursts through its husk, needs activity on the part of the fish. He cannot stay in the same place and lazily draw in his food as when he is taking duns in a slow-flowing backwater, but must rush hither and thither, a foot or more each time, and seize his victims just ere they reach the surface. These quick movements close to the surface make a commotion in the water, and very often this commotion is quite like that made by a fair-rising trout. I have often seen a trout bulging in exactly the same place

<sup>1</sup> It has imposed on me once this season (1910) on the Lyde.

time after time, over no doubt a large number of *nymphae*, and it is a fish like this which may now and then deceive even an old hand.

A bulging trout usually takes no notice of the natural insect floating down over him, as he prefers one course of his menu at a time. But though hours and hours may be spent by an angler over bulging trout without his adding to the contents of the creel, it sometimes happens that he ends by getting a rise and killing his fish. I have known a bulging fish come at a small red palmer on the Ver, and other bright flies, or small salmon flies may even prove attractive, though I have never tried them. At other times a trout feeding on *nymphae* will suddenly take it into his head to pick off a floating dun or two, by way of a slight change, and when in this mood for a few instants he may be coaxed into trying the artificial. On various dry-fly waters I have noticed that trout will sometimes give half an hour or so to the floating insects, and



then end up their meal with *nymphae*. When the May-fly first appears it often happens that most of the trout, whether in open stream, backwater, or amongst the bushes and trees, steadily bulge for days together; and then, being apparently sick of the *nymphae*, turn their attention to the floating insect. It takes trout a little time to become accustomed to the winged May-fly, though when they do grow used to it they will very often let themselves go. It is not gratifying to get two or three days' fishing in the cream of the May-fly season on some of the best water in the country, and to find that on these days the trout will do nothing but bulge. When time is up, and you sadly retire, you are sure to hear a little later that Brown, the duffer, killed ten brace of grand fish the day after you left, and that Jones returned everything under two pounds to the water.

The question is, What is the best thing to do with bulging trout? Some

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recommend a remedy for the evil in a bright-coloured or fancy fly, and that it will sometimes tempt trout I have found on the river Ver. But the remedy is far indeed from sovereign, and I believe that on the whole it is hardly worth trying, even at those hard times when every trout moving is bulging at the *nymphae*. It is better to continue to hope for a trout that is after the winged insect, or even assail bulging fish with a good imitation of whatever *ephemera* is hatching out, on the chance of getting a rise at last. Obstinate as bulging fish are, you can never say for sure that they will not suddenly come at the winged insect.<sup>1</sup> Some anglers have a theory that bulging fish may be attracted by an ordinary sunk artificial with its wings cut off, which is supposed to give it a likeness to the *nympha*. But in practice the theory does not work out, for even if you could exactly imitate the *nympha*,

<sup>1</sup> On the Test of late years I have often taken bulging trout with a dry dun.—June 1910.

you could not impart to it the natural movement in the water. Keep to the dry fly, or leave the bulging trout alone.

One word more on this and I have done. A trout feeding on *nymphae*, especially in shallow water, will often follow the artificial dun, May-fly, or spinner, with evident curiosity, several feet downstream, and follow or come and glance at it again and again. When a trout does this never abandon hope of hooking him. I have heard people say, "Ah, it's no good; he followed the fly, but refused it. Don't waste time over him." I think this is bad advice. Whilst a trout will follow, or glance at your fly, there is always a real chance of getting him. A fresh fly, or a little rest, will often bring him to hook.<sup>1</sup>

The bulging trout is known on all dry-fly streams, but the tailing trout is much less common. In the shallow streams of

<sup>1</sup> But do not spend much time on bulging fish if there are fair-rising fish.

Hertfordshire and Hampshire the "tailer" is very often seen. When he is plunging downwards into the weeds in search of shrimp, snail, and food of that kind, his tail breaks the surface of the water—hence the name tailer. It is very likely that trout in all streams where there is plenty of weed and food of the shrimp and snail order, rummage about in the same way as we see them doing in Hertfordshire and Hampshire waters. But they are not noticed except in shallow waters, because their tails do not break the surface of the stream. My experience is that a tailing trout is much easier, as a rule, to entice than a bulging trout. He must be fished for with a long line downstream, and the fly worked with a series of little jerks, somewhat as in salmon fishing.<sup>1</sup> The fly should be cast just above the spot where the head

<sup>1</sup> Since writing this my experience has changed. In the Hampshire Test I have only once done anything to speak of with tailing trout. I hooked three or four on the Gavel Acre shallows one day, but never, I think, afterwards. In Hertfordshire, however, I have often got good fish when they have been grubbing or tailing.—June 1910.

of the trout is thought to be, and worked into the angler's bank, and it must never be kept still, otherwise the fish will at once perceive the deception and refuse it. Even where there is plenty of ripple and a strong stream, the fly must be worked to and fro ; but then it is naturally easier to deceive the fish. In bright, slow-running water a big tailing trout will often follow the fly with a wave that thrills the angler, but, alas ! though he may follow several times if not scared, he will keep a respectful distance from the lure. There must be no striking until the fish is *felt*, even though the angler be almost certain that it has taken the fly. On one or two streams, like the upper Lea, tailers are to be seen any day, and often in numbers, up to and over four pounds in weight, and when there is no regular rise at duns, dry-fly anglers are constrained to look out for a tail, just as they do ordinarily for a rise. To kill tailers in broad daylight and in low water is quite an art in itself, and I have in my thoughts a dry-fly angler who

is a wonderfully skilful hand at it. He nearly always fishes with a big alder, which is a very killing fly indeed, and a far fairer one than the thing known as the Alexandra, that resembles no insect in the earth or the waters beneath, or than small salmon flies which are sometimes used for these gross-feeding fish. He believes in the big alder, as Mr. Thomas Andrews did in the big sedge. Although this method of luring of big trout gorging on shrimp and snail needs not a little skill and care in stalking—for any minute the fish may look up and see something of an incautious angler—it can never be regarded by the dry-fly fisherman as anything but a make-shift. It is not the real thing; it is nothing like the real thing. If in the midst of a campaign against a shrimper the dry-fly angler catches sight of a fish rising fairly at fly, he will be at the rising trout immediately, leaving the other to finish his meal in safety.

Sometimes when there is a moderate

amount of fly on, some trout will be rising, whilst others will be tailing; and then it is not always easy at first sight to distinguish between them, because the trout's tail may only just break the surface of the stream, making a little ring. Precious time may thus be wasted, just as it may over a bulging trout, unless the angler be on his guard, and not inclined to take it for granted that the ring is made by a fair-rising fish. You feel rather annoyed when, after creeping into position, and putting the driest of duns over a promising rise, an unmistakable tail suddenly shows up. Early in the season a tailer may often be taken with a floating dun, as it may indeed with almost any other fly, but this is the time of year when the hideous and lanky two-pounder ought to be quite four pounds for his length. Even trout on difficult streams are at meal-time in this season often as silly as they are soft—ready to take anything presented anyhow by anybody.

Far more refined, and yet to the dry-fly angler scarcely less troublesome at times than either the trout feeding on *nymphae* or on shrimp, is the trout feeding persistently on the smuts or curses. Ronalds,<sup>1</sup> whose excellent work, *The Fly-Fisher's Entomology*, though written

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Ronalds's headquarters were on the Blithe, or Blythe, "a sweet trout stream in Staffordshire," and close to Cresswell Station, where the painstaking angler-entomologist made a small observatory for studying the habits of trout. Here is one of the experiments which he tells us he made for the purpose that he might get some information as to the sense of taste in fish:—"I once threw upon the water, from my hut (by blowing them through a tin tube), successively, ten dead house-flies, towards a trout known to me by a white mark upon his nose (occasioned by the wound of a hook), all of which he took. Thirty more with *cayenne pepper and mustard* plastered on the least conspicuous parts of them were then administered in the same manner. These he also seized, twenty of them at the instant they touched the water, and not allowing time for the dressing to be dispersed; but the other ten remained a second or two on the surface before he swallowed them, and a small portion of the dressing parted and sank. The next morning several exactly similar doses were taken by the same fish, who probably remembered the previous day's repast, and seemed to enjoy them heartily. From these and similar experiments, such as getting trout to take flies dipped in honey, oil, vinegar, etc., I concluded that if the animal has taste, his palate is not peculiarly sensitive. My experience goes to prove, contrary to the opinion of some who say that the trout will take *every* insect, that he does not feed upon the honey bee (*Apis mellifica*), or wasp (*Vespa vulgaris*), and that he very rarely takes the humble bee (*Bombus*)."



half a century ago, remains a standard work on angling, does not refer to the several kinds of smuts, though on Derbyshire streams, which he knew well, they certainly abound in the heat of summer. None of the older angling writers appear to have taken any notice of this branch of watery entomology, and one or two well-known volumes which treat more than incidentally of fishing with the dry fly are equally silent on the subject. Possibly some, whilst aware of the annoying habit big trout have of feeding persistently on these tiny creatures, have recognised that, so far, the smuts have proved impossible to imitate. But the subject is not one which can be ignored by dry-fly anglers, and some notes by Mr. Halford on it are of no small interest. He gives a capital study of a big trout smutting, which I cannot do better than reproduce. "On a still, hot, muggy day in July, some two or three years ago," he writes, "starting from the lower end of a favourite club water, I wandered in a somewhat

disconsolate frame of mind gradually up the stream. Every now and again a fish would rise faintly and lazily to the surface, but the lightest and most accurate cast produced no response; and whether with smallest of flies or the smallest of hooks or large ones; whether with sad and sober coloured duns or gaudy fancy patterns; whether with winged flies or hackle ones, or bumbles; whether floating, half-submerged, or even sunk; whether fished up stream, across, or down,—the invariable result was nought. At length, reaching an eel-weir at the upper part of the water, and thoroughly exhausted by the long walk in waders and the high temperature combined, a smooth, sloping, grassy bank tempted me to take a well-earned rest. Reclining well out of sight, and looking over the still, calm surface of the stream above the weir, a gentle movement of a three-pound trout in the middle of the water attracted my attention. It seemed to glide slowly upwards, and scarcely making a ripple, just showed the

point of its nose above the water as it quietly sucked in some tiny insect. It then gradually dropped down till it was perhaps a foot below the surface, and slowly swimming to the right, again almost imperceptibly rose and took another fly; then to the left, taking a third; then again it leisurely sank to a short distance."

That is an exact description of what many observant dry-fly anglers often see on hot summer days, when sizable trout seem too lethargic to cope with a fly of the size of a small olive dun.<sup>1</sup> I have repeatedly seen big trout stealing about in a mysterious way from one side of a small bay or pool to another, every now and then poking the tips of their noses out of the water, and have concluded

<sup>1</sup> There are also several species of the smuts which appear on cold, blustering days in spring. In Easter week, 1896, "smuts" appeared in great quantities on the Derbyshire Wye, with a north-east wind blowing. Arthur Humbert and I noticed them on the Test at Kimbridge in April 1910, and I found the trout feeding on them quite eagerly; in two days I had only a brace of trout 1½ lbs. and 1 lb. 5 oz.; the hatch of dun was very short and poor.

they were indulging in the practice of "cursing." Sometimes, in a good light, a little pool or bay may be seen quite peppered with various minute insects, amongst which float a few duns—perfect giants compared with these blackish specs about the size of a pin's-head. When the trout are moving about in the manner described, and are showing a bit of black snout now and then, the duns are usually ignored, and the difficulty of coaxing a good trout is great. It is best, perhaps, to try some small fancy fly, if an imitation of the dun, May-fly, or alder prove unavailing. It is said that on some rivers smutting fish will take the fancy fly known as the pink wickham, dressed quite small on an 00 hook, but I have no experience in this matter. The wickham is a capital fly of the fancy order for dry-fly fishing,<sup>1</sup> as is also the governor. So much nonsense has been talked and written about various

<sup>1</sup> I now (1910) think the wickham one of the best of all artificial flies for the Test. I have had scores of good trout with it when the olive dun failed.



St. Catherine's Hill  
Winchester

Weymouth 1898



fancy patterns which are said to be particularly killing on certain rivers, and on certain lengths of rivers, that I shall as much as possible refrain from recommending any artificial which is not an imitation of a natural insect.

What are known amongst dry-fly fishermen as the smuts or curses should not be confounded with an insect of the order *Diptera*, which is often to be seen, on hot summer afternoons and evenings, dancing over the water in vast numbers, almost blurring the air, an insect the trout sometimes *snap at* eagerly. The smuts are much smaller atoms of life, and they are to be seen on and not over the water. There are certainly several different species, and possibly a much greater number. Besides the various books which deal with entomological matters, I have searched several works on water and other insects, but failed to find any classification of these insects. Indeed, it may be doubted whether they ever have been classified, and whether

there is any good information as to their life-history. Should this be so, what an admirable opening is here for an entomologist to step in and cap the labours of a Pictet, a Réaumur, or a Swammerdam ! To make his first experiments, he had best put himself in the hands of a dry-fly angler in the height of the smut season. As Professor Miall observes, "the names employed by anglers should be noted, as much information respecting the habits of aquatic insects can be extracted from anglers by those who speak their language." It would be surely no small triumph to go down to fame as the introducer of one or two new species of curses, though perhaps the dry-fly angler would not regard such a naturalist with kind feeling.

There is a species of the smut which I have sometimes thought is scarcely perceptible to the naked eye. At any rate, on a stretch of the Kent Darenth, I have again and again noted good trout rising in the quietest manner possible,



and taking some minute atom which I have never been able to identify or even discover. Directly a nice dry dun is put over these fastidious fish they fade away, and for a while cease rising; but leave the river and return in half an hour, and there you will see them doing exactly the same thing. The true smuts or curses cannot be properly imitated, partly because no hook is made small enough for the purpose;<sup>1</sup> and if it were it would not hold. There is a tiny fly which anglers often try, known as the black gnat, the wing of which is made out of a bit of pike's scale laid flat on the hook. I believe a patent was taken out for this little thing. A few anglers have used it with effect against smutting fish; most anglers prefer something more tangible. I may add that, mercifully, the wings of these mites lie flat. The idea of fishing with a well-cocked curse would be altogether too fantastic. I have only once

<sup>1</sup> The smallest hook made is the 0 0 0, which is, of course, sizes too big for a proper imitation of any smut to be dressed on.

tried the black gnat with the least success. At Whitchurch on the Test in 1899, I hooked (and lost) a pound trout with it. The trout was smutting near the mill-head at the time.

## CHAPTER V

### THE TROUT AT HOME

IF I were asked to say what I thought the most interesting feature of all about the dry fly, a feature peculiar to this style of angling, I think I should reply, "Seeing so much more of the thing than one does when fishing in any other way." To kill fish, it is true, you need only "spot" a rise. A tiny ring which has been exactly located serves the purpose of the angler. As a rule he can judge from the appearance of the ring or dimple, combined with the nature of the place, whether it was made by a sizable fish, or by something over which it is idle to cast; though in this, as in most other things to do with trout, there are excep-

tions. Early in the season the trout, lanky and out of condition, seem here, there, and anywhere. As the season advances, they take up positions in favourable spots, under the banks as much as possible, and in eddies and backwaters, where they can enjoy their insect meals in comfort and with a sense of security. When the cast is a long cast upstream on one's own bank, or across into the opposite bank, or again where the water is deep and comparatively dark-looking, or where it is rapid and broken, the dry-fly fisherman may not see much more of the movements of the trout than does he who fishes the stream. He sees the ring, perhaps nothing more, till the trout is hooked and played. There are strange, puzzling places in most trout streams of any size where a tiny ring is now and again noted, which the angler feels convinced must have been made by a very heavy fish, though nothing, not even a shadowy form, is ever seen. Most anglers can recall some

place of the kind, and the wonder is that no fish ever takes an artificial fly there. Frequently the theory is put forward about these deep, dark-flowing places, that the trout they hold are trout of great bulk and wisdom, which rarely trouble to take a small fly ; some prefer to believe that there is nothing in these places but a few yearlings ; whilst others are disposed to think that from some unexplained cause fish in them are able to see exactly what the angler is doing, and are therefore not inclined to look at an artificial fly. Again, there are places where the angler can never get near enough to see anything beyond the rise, because if he come near enough to see the fish he will be sure to scare it.

In such places and in late evening fishing, the dry-fly fisherman sees beyond the ring no more of his quarry and its movements than if he were angling downstream with a cast of sunk flies. But there are exceptions in small or moderate-sized streams like the Kent Darent or

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the upper waters of the Lea. When the water in these streams is at its normal summer level and brightness, the dry-fly fisherman usually sees the movements of the trout as through a glass, even when the cast is a fairly long one ; often when the fish is in slow, shallow water a few yards distant only from where the angler crouches, the whole performance, even to the opening and shutting of the trout's mouth, is seen, not darkly, but with perfect clearness. When the fish is a good one the excitement is greatly increased by a view of its proceedings. The anxiety, too, is naturally great, and a young and inexperienced hand is very liable to commit the error of striking too quick and too strong at the rise, and of thus whisking the fly from the water before the trout has had a chance of getting it well into his mouth. This mistake of striking too soon when the movements of the trout are very apparent to the angler is a rather common one, and by no means confined to the beginner. For

my part I find that in dry-fly fishing, as in shooting and in billiards, one may be on one day in first-rate form, and on another completely out of it. Some days everything seems to go wrong, no matter how much practice one has lately been having. The gut ties itself in detestable knots in the midst of the one fair rise of the day, though the wind is not especially bad; the line never seems to go out right; the fly simply won't cock up in sprightly fashion on the water; and the only good fish hooked all day gets off. I have heard a good angler say that sometimes he is so nervous and fidgety that he can do nothing to his own satisfaction, and that then all goes wrong. The bad mistake of striking too soon and of striking far too rudely, may perhaps be now and then a sign that the angler is quite out of form. It is not always fatal—though usually so—unless the fish has been scratched or has seen the movement of the rod. Sometimes, strange to say, the scratching of a fish does not imply

the scaring of him. On a small stream in the north of England, in exceedingly low and almost dead water, and in the bright sunshine, I found a good trout apparently taking some small flies. Lying flat down, and creeping within casting distance, I sent an olive dun to him. It was a poor shot, the fly landing two feet on one side of the trout, yet, the water being so low and bright, he saw it, came at once, and appeared to take it. I struck very roughly, owing perhaps to the extreme awkwardness of my position—I was lying stretched out almost flat on the ground. The hook came away from the trout with a noise exactly like that of a strip of a rag being torn up, and his head was actually pulled out of the water for a fraction of a moment. Nevertheless, he did not bolt in desperate fright, but remained perfectly still for a few seconds; then darted at a smaller trout lying a few feet off, whom he butted savagely. After this he returned to the position where I had first cast to him, stayed there



motionless for a little while, and finally faded quietly away under the shady bank where the water was deeper. Another time, when dibbling with an artificial May-fly in even shallower and stiller water, I rose a much heavier trout. He appeared to have the fly well into his mouth, but when I struck—with certainly all the force advisable—it came away with a queer little sound, rather like a very faint pop of the cork of a ginger-beer bottle. To my surprise the trout did not dash into the open stream, leaving a small wave behind him, but quietly remained where he was. I withdrew and dried the fly, hoping that he might presently desire to try it again. The lure was again presented, but, alas, he allowed it to float over his nose without giving the faintest sign that he was aware of it. It was presented a third time, and then the trout slowly sidled off to deeper water, and sank to near the bed of the stream. He was still well within sight, and it seemed scarcely

far-fetched to conclude that he was ruminating over the strange thing that had happened to him. This trout had not been scared—possibly because the hook had not pricked any soft and sensitive part of his mouth—but was offended. In the same way the bare sight of an artificial fly will sometimes offend rising trout, though they have been neither pricked nor missed. From some unexplained cause, the rings made by a rising trout will at such times cease directly an artificial fly has been offered, no matter how sure and neat the cast. Great is the chagrin of the angler as he puts his fly over one rising fish after another, and finds that the invariable effect of this is to set them down one and all. What is the reason of it? he asks himself, as he changes fly after fly and tries fish after fish; but he asks in vain.

At least once I have had a bitter experience of this kind, when throwing to trout after trout in the semi-darkness. The lower part of the Derbyshire Wye—

that is, from about a mile above Bakewell to Rowsley Bridge, where the stream joins the peaty brown waters of the Derwent—is famous amongst those who have studied it for its many good back-washes. The river curls and winds amongst the meadows, as Matthew Arnold's stripling Thames does above Eynsham Bridge—where, by the way, there are or used to be some large trout<sup>1</sup>—so that there are little nooks at almost all the sharp bends, into which the main current fails to enter in its impetuous

<sup>1</sup> The Thames or Isis for many miles above sleepy Eynsham is a little-known stream, and yet passing beautiful. In college days I loved to cut lectures, chapel, and hall, and in a sculling boat while away an afternoon in May or early June on this part of the river, having tea at Bablock Hythe, and returning to the city of the dreaming spires long after the last faint streak of purple had faded from the west. One afternoon and evening, amongst not a few spent in a boat on the upper river, I remember well. The Thames May-fly—a poor-looking, dusky little insect, compared to the fly of the Kennet—was out in myriads, and between Eynsham and Bablock I noted the rise of more than one heavy trout. It is near Bablock that the sweet-named Windrush, a stream that yields many a lusty trout and is well fitted, I believe, to the dry fly, steals gently into the Thames. Higher up flows in the Gloucestershire Coln, which at Fairford is one of the truest dry-fly streams in England.

course. In these nooks what current there is flows backwards in an opposite direction to the main stream, sometimes forming tiny whirlpools and eddies. But though the main stream does not enter these places, it washes abundance of surface food into them, and every good trout knows that it is here a meal may be best picked up, especially if the wind be blowing across from the opposite bank. In the open stream the trout to get his flies has to be very active and alert, as they are carried down quickly. But in many of these backwashes the flies sail up and down with the slow current, or get caught in the eddies, where they can be picked up without exertion. The trout, despite his great activity when hooked, or engaged in fight or frolic with another fish, likes to get his food as leisurely as he can. He likes, where it can be done, to lie very near the surface, his fins almost out of the water, and draw down the flies that come over his nose, or within a few inches of it, in a

gentle manner. After obtaining enough duns, he not uncommonly goes down a foot or so in a calm digestive mood, returning after a few minutes to begin afresh against the helpless little creatures which, unlike the common house-fly and so many other insects, are without the least sense of danger or the least instinct of self-preservation. Where the rise of flies is small, only two or three being in one of the smaller backwashes at the same time, the trout glides gently about and clears off every insect he can see, instead of taking up a stationary position and allowing the duns to sail up to his nose, when they can be sucked in. As a rule, a trout of, say, a pound in weight, which has taken up his quarters for the summer in one of the smaller bays, spends most of his time there, only going out into the stream when his appetite, too gross to be satisfied with fragile duns and curses, prompts him to try a course of freshwater shrimps, snails, etc. He will rarely bear with another fish in the same

place, and chases away any intruder—always excepting intruders larger than himself—with valour. Scared by an angler or a passer-by, he rushes out into the stream, but always returns when all is quiet again, and I have often known a trout hooked, played, and lost more than once in a little bay come back and in the end meet with his end in the place. Moreover, a trout will sometimes be a tenant of a backwash not only for a few months, but for years. In several instances, that come back vividly as I write, I can recollect hooking and losing a good trout one season, and returning and killing undoubtedly the same fish next year after a big set-to. The larger and deeper backwashes have room for several good trout; they are formed by a sharp bend, such as I have mentioned, or by a big tree stretching far over the water with its trunk and lower branches, or because the main current is on the other side of the stream and compressed within narrow limits. The most famous on the

Bakewell length was long ago known among Arthur and Jim Booth and myself as the "Pool between the Willows." It is perhaps ten yards long by three or four wide, and in spots is deep. Many scores of good trout, varying between three-quarters of a pound to a pound and a half, have been taken from this backwash with its steady current, which flows right round almost in a circle, and many scores of trout have there been stalked, risen, hooked, and lost. At the lower end of the backwash there is an aged willow which lays its great rough trunk for a little way almost horizontally across the stream, and on this the dry-fly fisherman likes to sit and watch for rises. The one drawback is the nearness of the road. It is not pleasant, whilst earnestly scanning the backwater for signs of a moving fish, to be observed and shouted at by black-coated tourists bound for Haddon Hall, a mile or so farther down stream. The dry-fly fisherman wants above all things to be alone with the fish he is hoping

to land. It is painful fishing to an *audience*, whether an appreciative one or not.

Immediately above this backwash is a formidable place one of us named the "Snaggy Pool," because for a long while it was half filled up with a great dead bough, amongst whose branches the best trout fed in happy seclusion from the outer world. This backwash is much smaller and, save at its edges, deep. A fish hooked there never wasted a moment in the backwater, but rushed into the strong stream, and strove to go under the great trunk of the willow tree. One still, soft evening in July 1891, I came thither flushed with success, having just landed a 2¼-lb. trout a hundred yards higher up stream.<sup>1</sup> It was one of those too rare evenings when big fish are lying on the surface in backwash and open stream, unsuspecting, approachable as during a short, sharp May-fly glut. Duns, midges,

<sup>1</sup> How it all comes back to one after many years! I wonder who fishes the Derbyshire Wye now, and is there a dry-fly set?



spinners, and flies of various other kinds were out in fair numbers. At the snaggy pool there must have been half a dozen sizable trout all well on the feed. In the middle of the pool, and close to the surface, was what seemed to my enraptured eye the king of Wye fish—a great light-green trout, certainly no smaller than the trout just landed, and far handsomer. Down on my knees was I in an instant, and an olive dun presented to that king of trout without the slightest delay. A suck, a quick strike, and away went the monarch, taking the line off the winch with a screech. The tree-trunk was reached, and, ah! the gut smashed like a silken thread, before the amazed angler had time to think or plan. There is no place a fish goes to faster, or with more decision, than a strong stream under a tree-trunk, or under great gnarled roots, and there is no place more fatal to the angler's chances.

This backwash fishing, whether on the Wye or other streams, requires the utmost

delicacy and nicety. Nearly always a backwash must be fished from its own bank. Fished from the other side of the stream there is *always* "a drag." The fly will only travel down naturally at the very edge of the backwater—indeed in the stream—and the trout will not take there. Why should he? He frequents the backwater because he can take his meals in leisure there, and the flies just outside, however near they may be, are travelling quick and can only be secured at some exertion. Some of the very small backwashes, where the banks are high, are all but impossible. They cannot be fished from the opposite side of the stream because of the drag; they cannot be fished from their own side because owing to the high banks the angler cannot see into them, until so close that he must scare any rising trout. I know of such backwashes about a square yard on various streams, and they are the despair of the angler; yet one is irresistibly drawn to peer into them with great care at least

once a day, to see whether there is a fish "up." To lie flat down in the grass, cast into one of these places, and wait to *hear* the rise, or observe the line to see it checked if a fish has taken the fly, is as a last resource sometimes tried, but very, very rarely with the least success.<sup>1</sup> You must see what you are doing, and keep an eye on your fly, to succeed in dry-fly fishing.

Backwashes of anything like a respectable size are fished from their own side of the stream, the angler creeping down very gingerly and hiding at their lower end. From the awkward positions he has to take up so as to hide himself, casting is usually a hard feat. The fly has an irritating way of catching in the grasses behind the crouching angler, or, should there happen to be any, to the bushes and trees around and above him; if there are no such impediments the casting is easier, but the chance of scaring

<sup>1</sup> I think Arthur Booth did this once or twice on the Derbyshire Wye. I have tried it there, but never got a trout thus.

the trout far greater. A bunch of willow herb, a single big dock, or a thistle, is better cover than none at all, and it is astonishing, as I have said, how the smallest particle of vegetation aids the stalker. The clear-cut outline of the angler against the sky-line is what no wild trout can stand, save in places where the fish are thoroughly accustomed to see people pass their lairs from morning to night. The dam immediately below Bakewell Bridge—beyond which Francis Francis, I have heard, used to say an angler need never go for sport—is one of these places. There is a much-frequented path on the right bank of the stream, and the trout (which are usually numerous in the dam), thoroughly accustomed to the sight of folk walking up and down, scarcely take the trouble to stir, even when lying within a yard or so of the path. As a rule, it is almost impossible to deceive a trout which sees you, but it is pretty certain that the Bakewell dam fish must see at times

a good deal of the angler and his rod ; yet sometimes they take artificial duns and May-flies freely in low, bright water. What with the plum-trees in the gardens just at the back of the angler, and the promenaders, it is discouraging to fish this place from the path side. Passers-by and spectators are, however, here considerate towards the distressed angler.<sup>1</sup>

To fish "far and fine" has been a rule of fly fishing for trout from almost the beginning of the sport. It is an excellent

<sup>1</sup> North-country trippers are at times very trying to the temper of the dry-fly fisherman. Once when I was in the thick of the rise, a stone's throw from Haddon, a party of rowdy day-trippers disgorged from a huge wagonette, came down in a cloud to the river-side, like a scourge of immense black flies, settling all around, so that to cast would have been to hook one of them and strike several others. Very different was my lot another day, when I had the privilege of fishing that lovely little dry-fly trout stream, the Bradford, on a July evening. Close to the beautifully situated village of Middleton a road follows the course of the stream. A number of villagers were enjoying their summer evening stroll along the road, and the prospect of getting a fish at this point seemed small. But to my surprise everybody made a point of keeping away from the water-side, and not a rising trout was set down. It was an agreeable incident, and seemed to me a sure sign of the respect and liking of the villagers for the noble owner of the stream.

precept for the wet-fly fisherman where the water is clear and low, and often equally good for dry-fly work. But "near and fine" is nearer the mark in fishing the backwashes of the Wye and other streams. In backwash fishing a drag is always fatal, owing to the gentle, almost unbroken flow of the water, and to avoid the drag you must get very close to the trout. A rod of 9 feet 6 inches to 10 feet is needed. There are few more ridiculous angling sights than that of a man with a 12-footer or a small double-handed rod trying to fish a small backwash. He might as well try with a tarpon rod and a tarpon bait. A rod of 11 feet always appears to me absurd when used for a small stream. Still, some use such a rod, and say they find it of avail for the few extra long casts that are needed to get to a fish clean under the bank at the broadest part of the stream.<sup>1</sup> In the backwashes of the

<sup>1</sup> A ten-foot stiff split-cane rod with a heavy line running freely through large rings will take the fly clean across the Test, a mile or two above Romsey ; but it is hard fishing. I have seen Mr. Hansard do it wonderfully there.—1910.

Derbyshire Wye it is a useless, helpless instrument, for to present the fly to the fish you would often have to get right back from the water's edge into the field ; and by doing so you would be fortunate enough if you hooked a trout in a season. A very heavy line, too, is a most clumsy thing to work in a backwater. I nearly always use a rod of under 10 feet, and have found nothing so convenient for this style of fishing as a good stiff one. A rod composed of hollow steel tubes, which telescope, is not a nice instrument to carry about with one during a sharp storm of thunder and lightning, any more than a gun is. I often used one, however, and found it good for fishing backwaters, as well as some of the overgrown and wooded parts of the stream. The line enters an aperture in the handle a few inches above the winch, and comes out at the top. It is sometimes rather a troublesome business passing the line through when the tubes have got at all rusty, and, in casting, the line after it

has got wet does not come off the reel and out at the top very easily ; it has a way of sticking to the hollow interior of the tubes and needs force to eject. These are the chief drawbacks of the all-steel rod, which, introduced a few years ago from the United States, seemed at one time likely to become popular amongst English anglers. On the other hand, this ingenious American invention has distinct points in its favour. The action is beautifully even, and there is no warping after a severe strain or spell of work as there is with so many wooden rods. The condition of the top joint of many an expensive wooden rod after a day's sport is often deplorable, whereas nothing can take the straightness out of a good all-steel rod. Of course a breakage of a steel rod, with no reserve top tube, would be fatal, for no splicing is possible ; but it is not easy to snap a steel rod, the tubes being exceedingly strong. In fishing backwaters and wooded places, where one has to crouch, kneel, or even lie down



almost flat in the dense vegetation, not only the fly and the cast, but also the line between the rings of the rod are constantly catching in something, no matter how carefully the angler moves. A steel rod is without rings, as the line passes through its interior, and this is no slight advantage. Finally, the line never clings to the outside of the steel rod as it does to that of the wooden one — another decided advantage.<sup>1</sup>

I know well that such remarks as these will seem most unscientific to the man to whom these questions of nice choice of implements are of first importance. They are important, but I do not believe in laying down any hard and fast rules about them. A rod is rather like a billiard cue. Each man when content with his own thinks it the best he has ever handled, and when thoroughly accustomed to it finds most other ones hard to use. John Bright, a keen salmon

<sup>1</sup> I still have this all-steel rod, and now and then use it; but there is nothing I think now so good as a good split-cane rod.—June 1910.

fisherman, is supposed to have said that in his experience anglers never agreed on any angling subject: had he limited his remark to the question of rods, he might not have been far from the truth. The wariness of trout in backwaters being so great, it is well to show them not one inch more gut, however fine it be, than can be helped, and equally important is it that the first cast should be a good cast. This is easy to say—often impossible to do. When fishing with a short line from an awkward, cramped position in an overgrown place, and with perhaps a nasty wind blowing, it is very hard to place the fly to a few inches, or even to a foot, at the first shot. But there is a thing which one can always do—refrain from removing the fly, even if wide of the mark, until one judges it to be well out of the fish's vision. The fly must be perfectly dry, and when it belongs to the *Ephemeridae*<sup>1</sup> it

<sup>1</sup> All the *Ephemeridae*, such as May-flies, duns, and March-browns, sail downstream with *folded upright* wings; whereas the alder and various kinds of flies, which are

should be cocked. The old rule in fly fishing used to be to let a trout alone, if after the lure had been fairly presented to him three times he failed to take it. On those private waters where trout swarm, and but little fishing is done, the rule might be good enough even for the dry-fly angler of to-day, but on club waters it is otherwise. A good fisherman will not hesitate to stay in the same place for an hour, if he sees a good chance of deceiving a heavy trout which is feeding well. Some will tell you that if once a fish follows the fly down for a foot or two, and then refuses it, he had best be left alone, as he does not mean business. My advice is, stick to that fish, whilst he is feeding on the natural fly, until you have either hooked or scared him. It is rather humiliating when a good fish, feeding freely on natural flies, comes now and then to look at your imitation and declines it. But whilst the fish continues blown on to the water, or fall off the overhanging trees, mostly have *flat* wings. The artificial imitations of the latter are, therefore, not made to stand up.

to feed, however persistently he refuse you, depend upon it there is always a fair chance of getting him into the net in the end. The oddest of little ways have these wiseacres of the backwashes ! It is not uncommon to see a trout follow the artificial fly two or three feet, almost touching it with his nose the while, and regarding it with mingled feelings of curiosity, longing, and suspicion. Perhaps after having followed and refused once, the trout will just glance at the fly as it passes him the second time, or make a queer little movement—nothing more. Then, though it passes time after time over his nose, he takes not the faintest notice of it, though sucking down every natural fly within reach. Finally, he suddenly takes a fancy for the suspicious-looking thing, and to the angler's delight comes at all costs and seizes it without the least hesitation. The whole of this interesting performance can often be distinctly seen by the dry-fly fisherman ; and yet there are folk who imagine that

fishing is dull, and who never can make out what in the world there can be in it to keep grown men by the river-side from morning to night! Why, if they could understand the fascination of the dry fly, they might be wondering at the contented disposition of the angler, seeing that the fishing day, save at the height of summer, is so short. A friend who fishes a great salmon river in the land of the midnight sun every season tells me about his twenty-four hours of daylight each day. What a grand place that would be, I have sometimes thought, for dry-fly fishing. The only drawback might be that in the May-fly season the dinner would probably be kept waiting, not till bed-time, but till the large hours of the following morning. For the zealous angler the day is all too short, and Paradise indeed to him would be that country where, in the words of Cowper, "the leaves never fall and the eternal day is always summer-time."

This kind of backwash fishing is not

confined to the Wye, though I do not happen to know of any other dry-fly stream where backwashes are so numerous and so inviting to the trout as on the Rutland length of this stream. The mile or so of the Dove, from the little wooden bridge at the beginning of the fields by the Izaak Walton Hotel to the junction with the Manifold, is a like kind of water, and here too the trout seek their meals in the backwashes, but they do not seem to dwell here throughout the whole summer so persistently as do the Wye fish. There are bays and backwashes on Test, Itchen, and Kennet, but these chalk streams are slower flowing, and the trout are quite at home and find plenty of favourable feeding-places in the open stream and under the shady banks. I do not recollect killing a backwater trout in any one of the beautiful Hertfordshire streams,<sup>1</sup> or in that fishful little

<sup>1</sup> But I hooked—and lost—in June 1899 in a little backwash of the Hertfordshire Mimram an enormous trout. It *must* have been 6 lbs., it *may* have been 7 lbs.—the largest trout I ever hooked.—June 1910.

stream the Kent Darent. Nor on the upper reaches of the Wye are backwashes favoured much by the trout. The Rutland is essentially the backwash length.

## CHAPTER VI

### DIBBING WITH THE DRY FLY

“The world forgetting, by the world forgot.”

No man can this line fit better than the ardent dry-fly fisherman, as, shoulder-deep in the green of the river-side, he waits and watches for the ring of a rising trout. Like sleep, angling is balm of hurt minds, bringing oblivion of the jar and fret of life. The serene atmosphere of the river-side, and what has been well described as the intense concentration of Nature on herself, are almost enough, apart from the excitement of sport, to make the angler forget his own little world of worry; and it is about the byways of the brook, the quiet back-



waters, that this concentration of Nature is so marked. The most secluded spots of all, however, where the heart of Nature seems to beat the strongest, are the plantations, the patches of woodland and of dense vegetation, found here and there by the margin of most dry-fly streams. In the pools, backwaters, eddies, and swirls of these wooded portions of streams, many of the biggest and boldest trout in the river abide through the season. These are the places which the half-hearted angler shuns, too careful of his tackle, and fearful of getting over his boots in some unsuspected pool of water or ditch. Not so the thorough dry-fly angler, who if necessary will go up to the knees in water to extract a fish that has badly weeded him, and who thinks nothing of being hung up or broken in pursuit of his quarry in difficult spots.

Backwash fishing, which was dealt with in the last chapter, is not very inviting in the early part of the season.

The fish found in the backwashes in April and the early part of May are not as a rule in good condition, the well-fed trout at this time of year preferring the open stream, where they can secure a much larger supply of general food, such as various kinds of shell-fish (*mollusca*)<sup>1</sup> and *crustacea*, chief amongst which is the fresh-water shrimp (*Gammarus pulex*), extremely plentiful in Hertfordshire and Hampshire rivers where the trout run very large. Nor is there the wish to dally long by these backwaters when the spring is yet young, as there is later in the bloom and glow of summer. Back-water fishing means a great deal of wait-

<sup>1</sup> Trout are very partial in some waters to the fresh-water bivalves. Mr. Armitstead, in his useful book *Anglers' Paradise*, says that bivalves are excellent food for fish, but that there is one slight danger in them—they feed with their tongues out. Small fish occasionally seize hold of these, and get their noses drawn into the grip of the shells. They have been seen swimming about with one of the *Cycladidae* firmly adhering to them, having been gripped by the nose. Even unwary birds and animals fall victims, and so large a bird as a water-hen has been found dead through having attacked a swan mussel (*Anadonta cygnea*). The beak of the bird was firmly held as in a vice, and, the bivalve being too heavy to carry about, the bird was drowned.

ing, and much crouching in the grass, which will scarcely be to the liking of most anglers at inclement and leafless seasons. The same may be said of the very wooded spots with which I will now deal.

When June comes in with a rush, and later in the garish days of advanced summer, trout in many well-fished dry-fly waters will often for a long spell not look at even the natural fly on the water till the light has begun to thicken. For hours the angler searches open stream and backwash alike in vain for a feeding trout, and on August afternoons, when the sun beats sheer down from a speckless sky, he may often be seen to sink down on some sheltered bit of ground under a spreading oak or ancient willow, and there rest and smoke. Pleasant, indeed, is it so to lie, well outstretched amongst the grasses and scented water plants. But though it is a rare way of getting through the fierce sun-steeped hours of the early afternoon, when nothing stirs

in the open stream, even under the banks with their narrow strip of shade—always excepting the grayling, who is the sun-worshipper of the trout brook, or a despised dace or chub—the angler would be for enticing a trout if he knew how. Sometimes this can be done. Trout that lie under the branches of trees which sweep the surface of the water, and trout in the caves of densely vegetated banks, are often quietly rising, with a few short breaks, the whole day. As their haunts are in almost perpetual shade, they are not affected by the conditions which put other fish off their food in the heat and burden of the day. Trout, moreover, in wooded spots and amid the tangle of the river-side feed more on flies of various kinds than do fish in open places. If a fly can be got to a trout in a tangle without scaring him, it will be taken.

Regular casting is usually impossible in woody places, where the angler very likely is up to the shoulders in great

docks, and hemmed in on all sides save that of the water with trees and bushes. It is even impossible to make the short casts from awkward positions which are often tried in backwash fishing in more open places. The angler must dib or dape with a dry fly. Moving with all stealthiness along the river-side, he closely scans every likely-looking spot within reach of his rod—for dibbing, as we shall see directly, must all be done at the closest quarters to the fish—till he sees a trout near the surface, feeding, or obviously on the look-out for flies. The trout discovered, it is necessary to arrange one's plans for getting unobserved within a few yards of him. As I have said, it is far easier to approach a trout where there is a little friendly shelter than in the open. Always taking the greatest care to move very slowly indeed, it is often possible to get within a couple of yards of a feeding trout, unless owing to high banks one is too much above him. The stalk successfully done, the next thing is to get the rod

into position for lowering the fly to the water in front of his nose. Of course, before this is done, indeed before the stalk is begun, the angler must have reduced his gut-cast by a matter of yards. With a rod of, say, ten feet, he can in dibbing manage only a line of half that length, and often I have found myself forced to limit the length of line and gut from the top of the rod to the fly to as little as three feet. To manipulate a longer line it would be necessary to hold the rod high, which even if—from absence of bushes and tree-branches above—possible, would be most awkward, certainly increasing the risk of scaring the fish. Thus a very short line in dibbing with the dry fly is naturally tried, and a foot of gut—instead of as in ordinary casting three yards—is usually the most that can be well managed. The rod has to be gently slid above, or beneath, or amongst—as the need may be—the herbage and bushes, till the top is over the trout. Then the rod is slowly lowered till the fly alights on the water.

What a moment that is when the fly, safely launched, floats to the trout! If the movements of the trout are often seen as through a glass in open streams some way off—and often seen more distinctly in the backwash—they are in dibbing not less clear to the eye than the printed words on this page. You can see even the little red specks on your fish, and can estimate his weight as closely as if he were lying in the grass at your feet; for consider, he is only a few feet off, at the top of the stream, and in clearest water. Sometimes the trout will wait for the fly in the usual manner, and quietly suck it in as it passes over his nose. Another time he comes to meet it, brooking not the least delay, and not seldom I have known a good trout simply rush to his fate, making quite a commotion in the shallow water. As the fly is gently lowered, it is without doubt sometimes seen by the fish ere it has touched the water, and I firmly believe that more than once I have seen a trout

*agitated* by the sight of the fly in the air. A certain indefinable tremulousness of the fish has been noted by me then.<sup>1</sup>

A dibbed-for trout, if fairly on the rise, is easy to hook if only the angler refrain from striking too soon. An old writer advises the fly fisherman never to strike until a trout has "turned his head." This at any rate is an excellent rule to follow in the spirit, if not in the letter, when dibbing. When one is dibbing the trout comes free and unsuspecting because the fly is presented in a perfectly natural manner, there being no drag, and neither line nor gut on the water. Perhaps trout sometimes "spit

<sup>1</sup> A friend (Frederick Pigou) relates this experience. Once, as he sat idly in his canoe on the great Tana river in Finland, he noticed two parr moving about almost within reach of his hand. On dangling his lure—a middle-sized salmon fly—over their heads, two or three inches above the water, he noticed that both fish repeatedly jumped at it with such good aim as to strike it several times, more than once colliding in the air as they rose together. This went on for a minute or two, after which the fish, though not scared, and attending strictly to the business of taking food as it floated past them, ignored the hanging fly.

My friend adds that he has also not seldom caught trout while dibbing for them in sheltered places—the fish leaping at the fly before it reached the water.



out" the fly—though this is not well proven—when fished for in the ordinary way, becoming quickly aware of the deception. But when a dibbed-for trout takes the fly there is, I believe, no danger of the kind. I have given a trout several seconds before driving the hook well home, and never repented it: I have now and then struck too soon, and always repented it.

The hook driven well home, the fight begins. The angler should, I think, always have a foot or two of loose line in his hand, to pay out ungrudgingly to the trout in the first wild rush for liberty. If he neglect this precaution the smash may come at once, instead of being deferred or altogether averted. These wildly wooded spots are the fastnesses of the trout. The fish knows his strength in such places, and usually—though not always—strains every nerve to break away at once. After the foot—sometimes indeed one dare not give him quite so much as a foot—of line has been paid

out, there must be no further concession by the angler. Forthwith, the butt's<sup>1</sup> the word. The angler must hold on grimly, risking everything even to the top joint of his rod. To let his fish take out more line is to lose him. Another inch and he will be in the snags, or weeds, or amid the jungle of the river-side, and then all is lost indeed.

As a rule, if you do not smother your trout and get him into the landing-net before he has had the chance to put forth

<sup>1</sup> To give a fish the *butt* is to put a heavy strain on him and let him bend the rod like a bow.

"I was very much excited. Sometimes I gave a jerk and a pull, and then the fish would give a jerk and a pull. Directly I heard some one running toward me, and then I heard Euphemia cry out—

"Give him the butt! Give him the butt!"

"Give him what?" I exclaimed, without having time even to look at her.

"The butt! the butt!" she cried, almost breathlessly. "I know that's right! I read how Edward Everett Hale did it in the Adirondacks."

"No; it wasn't Hale at all," said I, as I jumped about the bank; "it was Mr. Murray."

"Well, it was one of those fishing ministers, and I know that it caught the fish."

"I know, I know. I read it, but I don't know how to do it."

"Perhaps you ought to punch him with it," said she.  
—*Rudder Grange.*

his full strength, and to exercise his full resource, the gut-cast at the fine end will be broken, for as dibbed-for trout are but rarely lightly hooked, there is little chance of the fly coming away. Of course if the trout be a lusty one, he will very likely smash you whatever you do, but the short and sharp method of dealing with him is the best chance you have.

When dibbing with the artificial May-fly coarser tackle can be used, and then, unless the trout should chance to be a three-pounder or more, the angler will feel much more confident. About the fattest fish I ever recollect taking was when dibbing with the May-fly in a terribly awkward place. In his mouth were two artificial duns, one left there by myself the day before, after a furious struggle and a smash, and one by a friend two days before. That fish was proof against hooks such as small artificial duns are dressed on, but a May-fly on comparatively coarse gut, and plenty of butt, brought him out in a minute or so. He

gallantly sprang out of the water once, and fell deliberately, as it seemed, on a dead branch, but the hook held, and nothing could save him.<sup>1</sup>

In dibbing, the fly should be perfectly dry—let there be no mistake about this. Trout, in these wooded and—in the eyes of most anglers—inaccessible spots, are not over-particular as to the kind of fly presented to them, if it is all right in size, but they do like it dry. It is not easy keeping the fly dry in these spots. The angler is so hemmed in that he cannot dry it by half a dozen casts or so backwards and forwards, as he does in the open; and it is a laborious and risky affair withdrawing the rod from the bushes, for a false movement will set the fish down. As I have said, a trout on the rise amongst the bushes and rank herbage is a bold riser, and if the fly is properly presented to him it will

<sup>1</sup> I believe this was at the Rookery on the Wye by Bakewell twenty years ago, and that one of the flies in that trout belonged to my friend Jim Booth, a master of rod and line. That was probably the only time I ever beat either of the Booths.—June 1910.

usually be taken. At any rate, he will not follow it down, and behave in the hesitating manner a wary fish often does in the open—he will either have it or leave it quite alone. But then in these places it is not possible to be sure of getting the fly nicely to him at the first attempt. Often these trout are roamers; instead of taking up a fixed position for feeding purposes, they swim up and down some tiny bay or creek, picking up a fly here and a fly there in their wanderings. To get the fly to a roamer may need patience and application, even after one has got into position for dibbing, and inserted the rod through the river-side jungle. Thus the fly has often to be withdrawn and dried, and not seldom have I found it best to take the fly between the fingers and squeeze out the water, instead of retiring to an open place, and there going through the ordinary process. There is for getting over this difficulty a device which of late years has come into favour with many dry-fly

anglers for ordinary open stream work—the anointing of the flies with paraffin or Peter’s oil.

Not long since there was quite a discussion as to who discovered the virtues of paraffin for making flies float. It seems that the credit for the discovery is due to a descendant of Colonel Hawker, who authorised Mr. Andrews to publish the facts. If my memory serves me right, Mr. Andrews, with due gravity, confided this important fact to me, accompanying the information with a little bottle of the fluid, corked and sealed with red wax, on which were stamped his own initials. Never, said he, whatever you do, be without your paraffin.<sup>1</sup> I could not bring myself to take quite so serious a view, and in one of my constant articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on dry-fly matters, wrote in perhaps a somewhat irreverent strain:—“Paraffin is now carried about by a considerable number of anglers for anointing their artificial flies. Some have come to

<sup>1</sup> I used the very bottle with effect this year (1910).





THE WHITEWATER—GREYNELL MILL.



swear by it, and have the little bottle out every half-hour or so to paint the fly with. It certainly does help to make the fly float well with little effort on the part of the angler, and is thus rather useful when several hours' hard work with the rod has begun to blister the hand. For May-fly fishing in wet weather a little bottle of paraffin is especially valuable. But ordinarily, we fancy, the good sportsman will not trouble his head about it. The angler who is not up to the exertion of drying his fly in the usual method is about on a par with the gunner who takes his camp-stool out pheasant shooting. He had better by far have his hooks baited for him, and recline in luxurious ease. The paraffin man, however, takes a widely different view. If, having started on a fishing expedition, he found that he had left his bottle at home, then would blank despair claim him for its own. Back perhaps he would go, even with the river 'boiling' with rising trout, as only a man retires who has broken his middle

joint, or by a hideous oversight left his reel and line at home. But paraffin has a rival now in vaseline, which some use in preference for anointing the trout line. To cap everything of the kind, we are credibly assured that there is an angler who never goes down to the river without a supply of aniline dyes. By the aid of these he can exactly imitate the shade of fly which happens to be hatching out. If this sort of thing goes much farther, the fisherman's outfit will not be complete without a small chest full of bottles and brushes. There is usually enough as it is to carry about while fishing, even when the creel is empty."

Whilst abiding by the opinion here expressed that ordinarily the sportsman will do without the paraffin bottle, it can be conceded that the thing may be often of real service in dibbing. There is no need to soak the fly in the paraffin; all that is needed is to give the wings and body a light coating with a twig. The paraffin will not lose for a considerable

while its power of making the fly float, and it is in no way offensive to the trout. A tiny bottle, half full of the fluid, will last a long while, and it may be put in the waistcoat pocket. The objection to the general and invariable use of paraffin in dry-fly fishing is, to my mind, that it tends to make angling too easy and luxurious. The drying of the fly, it is true, is hard work when there is a steady rise throughout the day, or a big rise for an hour or so without a break. Yet it is a delightful exercise, giving play to muscles not often used in other sports and pastimes.<sup>1</sup> If the object of the fisherman is to avoid all exertion that is not absolutely necessary, he will end up by not going out at all, unless the weather and all other conditions promise sport, or he will be wheeled about in a bath-chair, and have scouts to signal to him the whereabouts of a rising fish. Long since, on one of the chief fishing club waters in

<sup>1</sup> To-day I don't think I could do without my bottle of paraffin (1910).

the south, the water-keeper was furnished with a pair of field-glasses for the use of members who might be enabled to sit at their ease and scan the river for rises, instead of hunting for them, as every man with the true instincts of a sportsman must always prefer to do. Could anything be more ridiculous than this kind of thing? Why, it entirely outdoes some of the luxurious customs inseparable from the huge shoots of to-day, which have taken the place of the old style of shooting fur and feather with dogs as the chief or only game-finders.<sup>1</sup>

For every brace of good trout killed in dibbing with a small artificial fly the angler must expect to lose at least a

<sup>1</sup> Field-glasses for trout fishing are simply foolish. But a friend tells me that several times in low water he has found a pair of water-glasses, such as are used in sea fishing for discovering the whereabouts of shoals of herrings, etc., of real service in his salmon river in Finland. On one occasion when sport, owing to the lowness and brightness of the water, was very bad, he drifted downstream in his boat, scanning the depths in order to discover a fish. Presently he found one in a pool not commonly frequented by salmon, at a considerable depth. He at once went ashore, and told his fishing partner, who hastened to the spot and enticed the fish with a prawn.

brace and a half, and for this reason, perhaps, some dry-fly fishermen will be inclined to regard the whole practice askance. The movements of the angler who is dibbing, and the way in which he uses his rod, suggest to the ignorant an unlawful method of fishing. I have heard of an accomplished angler and excellent all-round sportsman, who aroused the suspicions of a water-keeper, partly because of the way in which he stole about, haunting spots deemed impossible for fly fishing, and partly because he nearly always brought home something, even on days when half a dozen anglers had been heard to declare that they had "not seen a rise all day long." The suspect was accordingly watched at his stealthy operations, and genuine was the keeper's surprise when he discovered that no worm nor gross bait was used, but the trout tempted by the driest of artificial duns and spinners. I myself have for getting good fish on hopeless days been rebuked by a master. Seeing me perched on an

islet one June afternoon by the Rookery on the Bakewell Wye, and trying to get an impossible fish which was taking fly after fly, he demanded, quite sternly, how I managed to get into so extraordinary a position, and what I was doing. It is not pleasant to be thus worried after you have lost several flies and gut-casts in the trees—this was not exactly a case of dibbing, but of very awkward short casts—in the attempt to get to a fish in a cruel spot; so the somewhat tart reply to his questions was, “Trout up.” “Oh,” the past-master replied confidently, though he could barely see the rod, much less the fish, “I know—male fish taking *nymphae*; no good at all.” He was wont also, this angler, to associate the practice of dibbing with the use of the live insect, which would no doubt be effective, if a dry-fly angler could be found ill-bred enough to use it in waters where it is forbidden.

Anglers of experience and sense are not likely to bring charges of unfairness

against dibbing with the dry fly, but I can understand, though not agree with, their objection to a practice which must result in a good many trout being hooked and lost, and thus rendered very shy of the artificial fly. A like objection has been lodged against late evening fishing ; but it should be borne in mind that, whereas in evening fishing the fish hooked, lost, and rendered shy are those which frequent the most open parts of the stream, the fish so treated in dibbing live in spots perfectly inaccessible to the angler who confines himself to the ordinary methods of casting. A dibbed-for fish can, after a time, be highly educated, but seeing that usually he lives the entire season in the jungle, this does not affect the sport of the man who fishes only the open stream and the accessible backwashes. Even if he does desert his jungle, and henceforth frequent the open stream, after having been once or twice hooked or pricked, is this added wariness of his so great a misfortune from an

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angling point of view? We all like to get fish; as Juliana Berners says in her treatise, "Yf the angler take fysshe: surely thenne is there noo man merier than he is in his spyryte." Yet for all our complaints about the over-education and the fastidiousness of trout in these days, few who have thoroughly mastered the dry fly would really desire to see fish come to the hook as they appear to have done in Colonel Hawker's time. Why is the trout so high above other freshwater fish in this land, in the eyes of the angler who has had experience of all? Because he is more beautiful, more gallant and active, but, above all, because he is *more difficult to deceive*.

. . . . .

Until you have learnt your way about the jungles, islets, and alleged impossible places to angle in with a fly, you must be a stranger to the environment of the trout brook. When first I came to study these angling byways, it seemed to me that I had best keep their pleasant secrets to



myself, lest others should rudely thrust their way through the rushes and great docks, and trampling out a footpath find their way to his favourite spots and disturb or hook my trout. But he is a churl who keeps all the best things of the brookside to himself, for there is room and to spare. These jungles and islets are the haunts of mallard, grebe, and other shy water-fowl. In May and early June the brown nightingale here sings lengthy songs to his sitting mate by day, and snatches by night; whilst, in the densest spots of all, the reed-warbler hangs its long, weaved nest in the rushes, as secure from the hand of the nest-hunter as it is in the backwaters and islets of the Isis far above Oxford. The splendid cock pheasant and the kingfisher give glows of brightest red and blue to relieve, if relief be needed, the deep green of the bountiful earth. The foxgloves, willow-herb, and delicious meadow-sweet grow in the greatest profusion, the first sometimes as tall as the giant ones in the New

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Forest ; whilst the true river-side forget-me-not is lovelier here than the loveliest of blue skies. It is a world of its own, this wooded fastness of the trout—beautiful beyond expression and beyond belief.

## CHAPTER VII

### EVENING FISHING

THERE is a spell in evening fishing which must hold every angler, whether his fish be the salmon in the great impetuous rivers of Scotland and Norway, the trout in the leafy chalk streams of Hertfordshire, or the troutlet in the never-silent brooks that water the remote and desolate moors of Somerset and Devon. To the dry-fly angler evening and night fishing, that is, fishing up to nine o'clock or thereabouts, lack this one charm—the movements of the trout are no longer clearly to be seen.

Evening fishing scarcely begins till June, and it lasts till the end of the season, though the evening rise of September is

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a very short one, the river-side swiftly becoming cold and dismal after the sun sets, when damp mists have ended all sport with the fly. The latter part of June, and July and August, have always seemed to me to be pre-eminently the season for evening fishing. When the water is low and clear, trout of a respectable size are very chary of having anything to do with an artificial fly in the open stream, or the bays and backwaters, during the garish light of day. Thus often for a week or so at a stretch, the dry-fly angler wanders about scarcely expecting a rise the afternoon through, but confident of taking a brace or two at sundown, when the quiet of night has begun to steal over the river-side. Now, in the dusk, is the time when the big trout, which have been hardly seen at all since the May-fly, glide cautiously out of their dim hiding-places, and for an hour or so deign to partake of a small meal of duns, spinners, or flies of the family of the *Phryganidae*. One writer has divided

the evening rise into three parts: first, the rise of the trout at the ordinary small water flies, the duns and spinners; second, the rise at the small sedge; and, lastly, the rise at the larger kind of sedge, which seems to hatch on the Test and other streams more freely about dusk. There is not the least doubt, however, that the ordinary small-fly rise, which begins on a summer evening after a burning day, lasts far into the night in some streams. I have often noticed considerable hatches of duns after eight, and up to nine o'clock. The exact species of the dun I have not been able to determine—though I incline to think it was an ordinary light or dark olive—owing to the absence of light, but that it was a dun I have felt certain. A good and an enthusiastic dry-fly angler, who one season went daily backwards and forwards between Manchester and Bakewell—a matter of close on eighty miles in all—to get an hour or two's fishing in the evenings, has killed a trout with an olive dun as Bakewell Church

clock has been striking ten o'clock! Many a time I have with an olive killed trout on the Darenth—a good stream for evening fishing—between eight and nine in August, and I have a vivid recollection of hooking and losing trout after trout one night on the Kennet *after* ten o'clock had struck somewhere in the pleasant, old-fashioned town of Hungerford. Here the fly used was not a dun, but a small silver sedge, there being a vast number of sedge flies buzzing about the river-side. The trout were rising all over the stream, and making a great commotion, which by the way is far from being a sure sign that they are taking the insect in its winged state.

Trout in waters that are much fished are as a rule easier to deceive in the dusk and in the semi-dark than in the day; but it is quite a mistake to suppose that they will, therefore, put up with anything. To begin with, it is absolutely necessary, when fishing dry fly, to avoid the drag. I recollect at a dark bend of the Derbyshire

Wye one evening, when the water, held up probably by the mills, had died away in parts to a mere trickle, hearing a good trout rise somewhere under the opposite bank. As I have said, the ordinary rise of a heavy trout is a very dignified, quiet proceeding—a suck, with no sound, and sometimes with no sign save a little bubble. But the rule is not invariable, and on occasions a loud-sounding (but not splashy) rise is instinctively recognised by the angler as that of a heavy trout. In swift, smooth runs a fish often makes a noise in rising, whether he be trout or grayling, and at night especially these resounding rises are often noticed ; indeed they may be in dark spots the sole guide to the position of a rising fish. Perhaps this more impetuous rise is because the trout feels safer and bolder in the semi-dark, or his appetite may be keener then. It is certain that trout at night do sometimes rise noisily at duns and other flies in spots where they rise quietly in the day.

For some few minutes I could not discover the exact spot where my trout on this particular evening was taking flies in such a noisy style, as the light was very bad. But by keeping my eyes fixed on the spot close to the bank immediately opposite whence the sound appeared to come, I was able after a while to locate with some accuracy the fish, which was rising several times a minute. A dozen casts, the fly being carefully dried each time, brought no response, and the darkness being now too opaque the attempt was abandoned. The fly—a light olive quill, or dun—with which this trout was assailed had been killing well during the evening rise, and there was no reason to doubt that the trout was taking the natural dun. What was the reason of my complete failure to tempt him? A friend explained it. “Just at the point you were fishing,” said he, “there is always a drag *when the river is low.*” This most likely was the right explanation. I knew there was ordinarily no





THE LODGE AT BASING.



drag at this particular spot, and had not calculated on the altered conditions caused by extreme lowness of the water. It was too dark to discover the change in the flow of the water, although it is astonishing how much you can see of the stream by intently watching after your eyes have grown accustomed to the darkness.<sup>1</sup>

The drag then—when fishing with the dry fly—is not less fatal to sport in the evening than in broad daylight. I believe it is quite as desirable to fish with a dry, and—where a dun in the winged state is used—with a cocked fly in evening as in day angling. That trout rise free and sure at flies in the dusk and the half-dark shows that they can see well enough in that light—therefore the artificial

<sup>1</sup> In daytime the eye will soon accustom itself to dark, deep-flowing, or quiet water in which it seems at first impossible to distinguish anything. More than once a Welsh gillie has seen in a few moments, and pointed out, a salmon lying far down in rough, dark water, which it has taken me several minutes to distinguish faintly. It is to be feared that this power of vision is occasionally turned by the poacher to the purposes of snatching salmon; but to the dry-fly fisherman it is of the greatest service at times, enabling him exactly to discover what the fish are really doing, whether taking fly or merely bulging.

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should be presented as if it were still quite light. Grayling do not as a rule rise in the evening like trout.<sup>1</sup> Very likely, if there has been any surface food about, they have been rising all the afternoon in the hot sunshine—a time at which they are often most earnest risers—and so have had their fill; or it may be the grayling knows he will have a great deal of trouble for very little gain if he settles down to a rise when the sun has set and the darkness is closing in. He comes up from a greater depth after the fly than the trout, and often misses his aim in daytime; at night his difficulties may be greater.

Avoid the drag, keep your dun dry, and you can look for sport on soft, still evenings, when the big trout are up and doing. As for the exact shade of fly, there seems to be a general opinion amongst dry-fly anglers that this is not important; indeed, you cannot well know

<sup>1</sup> But I have taken them in the evening once or twice from the Derbyshire Wye.—1910.

what shade the natural fly is, and therefore a frequent changing of one shade of olive or sedge for another, and of one kind of fly for another, is at the best but mere guesswork. My own favourite fly on various streams for the evening fishing is a red quill, not dressed on too small a hook; yet if the evening rise finds me with an olive dun or an apple-green on, I usually refrain from changing the fly, a thing which takes time—whether eyed hooks or hooks dressed on gut are in use—when time is most precious. Of course, where the sedge comes on in quantities, it is the fly to be tried before any other. Spinners, too, and spent gnats come out in the evening, and sometimes they are exceedingly deadly, but even when the trout are feeding freely on the spent gnat—which is the *imago* of the May-fly—they may be induced to look at other lures. The spent gnat will ever be connected in my mind with Whit-Monday 1895, which is referred to in another part of this book. That evening big fish rose

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in short, sharp bursts at the spent gnat as I had never seen them rise before; and yet they freely took a “fly” dressed on a double hook, and called a palmer, to which I was driven through necessity.

I have a weakness for the red quill,<sup>1</sup> because in August 1890 with that fly I steadily got good fish of far above the average weight every evening for about a week, when no other angler got a sizable trout. Each evening the red quill got its handsome trout or brace of trout, at about the same hour—between half-past seven and half-past eight o'clock. The best trout of the lot scaled just under  $1\frac{3}{4}$  lbs., and gave far more sport than I recollect a trout of 2 lbs. or  $2\frac{1}{2}$  lbs. giving on a southern stream. The story of its capture is this:—Shortly after sunset, three of us anglers who had been out since nine or ten in the morning met at the river-side, and strolled leisurely

<sup>1</sup> This was written in 1895; I have never done anything with it in late years on the Test, but on the Lyde I returned to it this year (1910) and found it good in the afternoon and evening.

homewards, talking about what all were agreed had been absolutely the worst day of a long and unbroken succession of bad days. Reaching a point where the stream almost touches the road, we stood still for a few minutes, and looked without hope at the water as it curled round a sharp bend and passed through a very wooded corner, with a spinney on one side and an islet on the other. From a certain spot in the spinney, which was on the opposite bank, and known as the Rookery, it was possible to cast across under the islet, and many a good fish had been hooked and taken there. For long hours nobody had seen the faintest sign of a rise on any part of the stream. Now, however, as we three disconsolate anglers stood and condemned the fish and the water, and their ill-fortune, I fancied I saw in the twilight the faintest, most modest of dimples in an eddy under the bank of the islet.

Crossing the river a little higher up by some stepping-stones, I made my way to the open place in the Rookery, and

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kneeling on an old stump watched earnestly for a while. Presently the faint, modest dimple was repeated, and then I knew that either a very small, or else a really good trout must be feeding there. The open space is only open so far as trees go. Otherwise it is covered with a dense undergrowth of huge docks, with sedges, with beds of stinging nettles, with miniature forests of nightshade, willow-herb, and meadow-sweet. It was already fast growing dark at the Rookery, and the cast was not a short one. Somehow the line *wouldn't* travel out clean and straight to where the fish was moving. Now the fly caught in a bunch of willow-herbs, and now in the sedges; when, up to the shoulders in the rank undergrowth, I went to extract it, I stumbled into a ditch filled with nettles; then the line wound round and round the docks, and had to be reeled up before all was ready for a fresh cast. At length the fly went across the stream, and, joy! he came at it; but, misery! I missed him. Then



more casting and more catching in those vile things. But again the fly went out, and up he flashed, fiery red, as it seemed, like a char, owing to some odd effect of the uncertain light. This time he had it, and *whirr-r-r-r* went the line off the reel as he turned and rushed downstream at feeling the hook driven well home. Suddenly the strain on the rod ceased and the point flew up straight. With ominous forebodings I reeled in, when, O good! out he dashed from almost underneath my feet, and *whirr-r-r-r* again went the reel as he tore across stream and stopped in the very spot where he had been first seen dimpling. Several times he sprang clean out of the water, at this point deep and strong, and once at least after his struggles had somewhat slackened he yet indignantly spurned the landing-net. Such fierce play, however, cannot last long, and, the relentless hook holding, I got him, splashing and protesting to the last—gallant trout that he was—into the net, and

strode home in the moonlight full of pleasant thought. Though an old fish—as his under-jaw, like that of a cock salmon, showed—this trout was in absolutely perfect condition, and beautifully clean and bright. There had not been time for him to get stiff or dry in the bag; and, laid on a dish on the well-known old oak table in the hall of the Rutland Arms, he made as good a picture as any angler could wish to see. He could not have been handsomer had he scaled 4 lbs. or over, and I believe that had he been that weight, he would probably not have shown such fierce energy and such dash—though of course a four-pounder would be an appalling fish to tackle at the Rookery with finest gut and a small fly.

This trout made no attempt to get to the weeds, though after his rush back under the angler's feet almost, he had plenty of slack line and could easily have buried himself in several big bunches which grew in that part of the stream

and thus have ended the fight. Trout do not appear "to weed" the angler nearly so often at night, probably because they do not see him; otherwise it would be next to impossible to kill big fish on fine tackle; and I imagine that it is the same with such grayling as chance to be rising late. Spots, therefore, which look the most dangerous in the half-dark, may be easier to kill big trout in at night than at day.

It may be asked, "How can you fish the rise properly when the darkness sets in, seeing that to be at all successful you have to follow the course of your fly so carefully?" Well, you can often by stooping down, and keeping the sharpest outlook, follow your fly quite distinctly in quiet water, unless you happen to be *looking right into* what light there is. When you cannot see your fly you look out for some sign of a break in the water, such as a fish rising would make, or you must, in an extreme case, listen for the rise. It is a golden rule in this kind of

fishing to have as little line out as possible. With a long line you run a great risk of getting hung up, or worse, of getting line, gut, and fly mixed in one terrible tangle before you know what has happened. It is possible to get very near a rising trout directly darkness begins to set in. Though fish appear to see well enough what is going on within the water, they cannot distinguish much without, and, if the angler takes care not to allow his figure to cast too much shadow on the water, or to stand out clear-cut against the sky-line, he can get as near as he wants to his fish. Once on the Darent, being repeatedly defeated by the drag in an attempt to allure a capital riser, I went round and dibbed with a short line at not a yard's distance from the fish. There was no cover of any sort to shield me, yet the fish saw nothing to alarm him, took the artificial dun almost directly it touched the water, and was secured a minute later. But this is the only instance I recall of successfully dibbing with the

dry fly at night ; ordinarily, the method is out of the question then.

Is the use of a large fly on very coarse gut late in the evening, or at night, when big trout are abroad, and the small dry fly ineffective, a fair form of sport ? Some declare that it is not, and are even ready to say that the practice is akin with pure poaching. Without going so far, I incline to think that on regular dry-fly waters the practice is objectionable. As we have seen, a monstrosity misnamed a fly is on some rivers often tried when there is no natural dun on the water, or when there is a small gale lashing the stream into regular waves. But then it is tied on finer gut. There are anglers, however, who use a big sedge as a dry fly late in the evening, and that method is of course quite upright. Mr. Thomas Andrews of Crichmere assured me that most of his big fish—up to and over 5 lbs.—taken late in the evening on the upper waters of the Wey, and on the Tillingbourne, its once troutful tributary,

were killed with a large sedge fished dry—and latterly well paraffined. It is certain that the big fly, or big monstrosity, is in some streams the deadliest lure for really big fish late in the evening. On many stretches of the Kennet it is killing, and in past times I have more than once seen the commoners of the old Hungerford Fly Fishing Club raking the water with huge Alexandras, or something of the kind, after sundown. On the Rutland length of the Derbyshire Wye I believe the big-fly and coarse-gut method would not be of the slightest use. The Wye trout feed too regularly on duns, spinners, and the like, to have anything to do with monstrosities ; whereas the biggest Kennet trout, like those on some lengths of the Ver, virtually ignore small flies altogether. On the whole it must be said that this big-fly and coarse-gut method is not nice or artistic ; but to call it unfair is quite another thing—especially when it is tried as a last resource.

Some streams rarely, if ever, produce

good evening fishing. From personal observation I incline to think that the large streams are better adapted to this style of angling than the small streams. On one length of the Hertfordshire Mimram, I have been assured by the water-keeper, a true observer, that an evening rise is a rare event ; but several miles farther down stream the rise is often exceedingly good as the warm summer nights close in. On streams which are much fished, good trout, as I have said, when the water is very low and bright as gin, will scarcely look at a fly all day, even though there be a little natural dun out. At such times they usually come to the surface for an hour or so after the sun has set, and cruise about on the lookout for food, even when there is no hatch whatever of fly. Trout then will take quite as readily as if they were actually rising at fly. Often one knows instinctively that a trout is after flies, and will come to the artificial, if it is fairly presented to him, though he has not been

seen to break the surface of the water. These are the exceptions to the rule of the dry-fly angler to fish the rise only. Trout, very good ones too, are taken in the evening in this manner. That flies are food of which trout are particularly fond is shown by this—tailers will in most streams usually stop shrimping when a hatch of duns begins, and rise at the fly eagerly. Yet it must be easier to get a large meal of shrimps and food of that kind than of duns, or of the little smuts, which big trout are so fond of.

The occasional bitter disappointments of the angler, who hopefully waits for the evening rise, have been often dwelt upon. Truly it is galling, when we find trout rising all around, and rising, it seems, at winged fly, and yet we cannot attract a single fish. On a few evenings I have left the river “boiling” with rising trout, and gone home, rather cast down by my failure to rise a fish, or, worse, by the knowledge that every fish I put a fly over at once stopped rising.



Yet, on the whole, in evening fishing many dry-fly anglers must always find a keen and choice joy. What a fascination there is about the dark and darker flowing water, and what possibilities of very heavy trout lurk in deep, still pool and in eddy ! Then, after the steam has begun to rise like smoke from the river—the signal for trout instantly to cease rising—how good that walk home, whilst the setting sun and the rising moon are rivals in the very lovely midsummer sky. Now and again the angler may stop for a few moments to listen to the distant voices of the late returning haymakers or field labourers, and to the low song of the stream amid its reeds and against its old willows ; to watch the faint light on the water, and to enjoy the scent of fresh-mown hay. Then the solitary heron, winging home to its great nest-tree, takes to itself something of the mystery and sadness of the ended day ; whilst a startled wild duck, fluttering up with loud cry from a reed-bed in mid-stream, dashes off on noisy

wing, to leave the sense of silence and repose only deeper than before. Happy the angler who can carry, etched on the tablets of memory, some faint impression of these delicious sights and sounds. They will be good to recall and ponder over another evening, when the rod has been laid aside perforce, instead of merely shouldered—the evening of his life.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TROUT FLIES

THERE is no angling matter about which such a number of confusing contradicting theories have been offered and rules laid down, as that of the artificial flies to be used in trout fishing. The bare mention of the flies, some being imitations more or less close of natural insects, whilst others are of a purely fancy character, recommended since Cotton's time, would fill a book ; and if directions as to the dressing of the same, and as to the particular season and time of day when these flies might most properly be used, were added, a fair-sized bookshelf would scarcely hold the literature on the subject. Take that old volume of Thomas Best's, *A Concise*

*Treatise on the Art of Angling*.<sup>1</sup> In the second part of the treatise, "The Complete Fly-fisher," we have not only minute directions as to the flies to be used during certain months and in certain states of atmosphere, but at certain hours of the day. "The pale blue," says Best, is "a very killing fly from ten in the morning till three in the afternoon"; the great red spinner "kills very well till the latter end of August, from six o'clock till twilight, upon a dark-coloured water"; the little whirling dun "comes on the water on the 12th of April, and is taken in the middle of the day and all the month through, and in blustering weather to the end of June"; the violet fly "kills very well from the sixth to the tenth of April"; whilst the yellow dun "is taken from eight to eleven and from two till four." Few angling writers, perhaps, have gone the length of Best in laying down rules as to the exact hours when such and such

<sup>1</sup> Best's *Art of Angling* must have been a popular book in its day. My own battered old copy, dated 1810, is one of the ninth edition; and this, I think, was not the latest.

a fly should be used, but precise directions as to the various flies to be used for the various months have been, and are still, very often given; whilst some of the older books for holding flies with gut attached have for the use of the beginner interleaved notes on the subject. Small wonder there are people who hesitate to take to fly fishing, because they shrink from the great difficulty of mastering the information about the flies which they must use.

Dry-fly fishing has no doubt added to the enormous number of artificial flies and patterns already in being, the collection of several centuries. Such flies, for example, as the pink wickham, Hammond's selected, the Whitchurch, the intermediate, the blue-winged olive, Flight's fancy, and many other lures, both fancy and imitation. were invented by the ingenious pioneers of dry-fly fishing; whilst every season sees a host of improvements or reforms in the method of dressing various patterns. The olive

dun and the May-fly of 1895 were no doubt claimed by the professional tiers to be an advance on the patterns used in 1894, and the flies of 1897 will be declared more effective than those of 1898.

Yet the tendency of dry-fly fishing is towards restricting the number of flies and patterns, and therefore of simplifying a most complex, confusing branch of angling. We are coming more to recognise that it is not so much the kind of fly used that takes wary trout, as the resource, patience, and skill of the angler who casts it. The dry-fly angler watches the trout in the water closer than the angler who fishes the stream. He must do this to have sport, and—thanks to the character of the water which he fishes—he has far better opportunities of doing so than the wet-fly angler. As a result, he has found that the difference of natural flies on which the trout *regularly* feed is decidedly limited. Many of the flies, which were held indispensable to the complete equipment of the fly fisher-

man, whether he fished in north or south country streams, whether in clear, slow-flowing waters, or in tumultuous and dark-coloured waters, have been long since dispensed with by those who fish the rise. Flat-winged and hackle flies can, it is true, be used for dry-fly work, and by paraffin made to float almost as well as the imitations of the *Ephemeridae* (the duns, May-flies, and March-browns) expressly made with split or separate wings for this style of angling; but they are not commonly used. The principle of dry-fly fishing being to imitate Nature as close as possible, the angler is naturally inclined to limit his choice of artificial flies to the imitations of those kinds of insects which are seen on the water in numbers. Such insects in dry-fly waters can almost be reckoned up on the fingers on both hands, and this list will, I think, be found to exclude no fly of importance to the angler:—The olive and blue duns and the red-spinner, the iron-blue dun and the jenny spinner, the March-brown and the

great red spinner, the yellow dun, the red quill, the May-fly and the spent gnat, the alder, the sedge, and the grannom. A good many anglers would probably be inclined to reduce this list of flies for general dry-fly work. The grannom is only found on a very few of the regular dry-fly waters, such as the Kennet and the Lambourne, where it sometimes comes on in April in vast quantities, without always making for sport; the jenny spinner, which is the *imago*, or perfect form, of the little iron-blue dun—as the small red spinner is of the olive or blue dun, the great red spinner of the March-brown, and the spent gnat of the May-fly—has never yet been well imitated; whilst the great red spinner is very rarely used as a single floating fly by either north or south country fishermen. The list, therefore, might for ordinary purposes be reduced so as to include only these flies: the olive and blue duns and their *imago* the red spinner, the iron-blue dun, the March-brown, the yellow dun, the red



quill, the May-fly and its *imago*, the spent gnat, the alder, and the sedge. And I must say that the dry-fly angler who has his box or book fairly well filled with a good assortment of well-dressed patterns of these flies, and is yet unable to do anything with the trout, cannot reasonably set his lack of success to his want of "the right fly." I confine myself to olive, iron-blue, and yellow duns, red quill, alder, sedge, May-fly (when the May-fly season is on), with two fancy flies, the wickham and the governor—to which I will refer later—and always feel sure, after a blank or a bad day, that the fault has lain with myself or with the trout, probably myself, not with the lure.<sup>1</sup>

The olive dun may be quite safely described as the chief fly used in this style of angling, and there are good fishermen who say that in many dry-fly waters there is really no need to go beyond it. Certainly in every dry-fly

<sup>1</sup> To-day my list would probably be olive dun, wickham, hare's-ear, iron-blue dun, red quill, sedge, alder, and May-fly (June 1910).

water I have seen, the olive seems to be the chief insect through the season, save for the short space of time when the May-fly and the grannom are on, or when a big hatch of iron-blue dun occurs. It may well be looked on as the standard fly of the angler from the beginning to the end of the season.

What is known as the olive appears in, I believe, at least half a dozen forms, and the patterns dressed by the fly-tiers, of course, far exceed that number. Each fly-tier has many dressings of his own for the light olive and the dark olive, the light olive quill and the dark olive quill, the medium olive, etc.

There seems little doubt that some of these forms are merely variations in shade and in size of the same insect. It is proved that the red spinner is the *imago* of the blue dun and of the olive dun, these two duns being, as a fact, one and the same. Foster, the author of the *Scientific Angler*, and a fisherman in his day of great repute in Dovedale, tells us

that he was able to make experiments which proved that these insects were of one and the same species. He got the eggs of some red spinners, deposited them in a fish-hatching box, and watched their metamorphoses. The first specimens that hatched, a year or so after the eggs had been deposited, took the form of the blue dun. This was in February, but later on, when the weather became more genial, the specimens hatched took the form known to anglers as the olive dun. The flies became lighter as the season advanced, and there were also variations in size.

I accept Foster's assurance that olive and blue duns are one and the same species, the colour varying according to the time of hatching; and that the forms known as the whirling blue dun, the apple-green, etc., are also nothing more than variations of the same species, attributable to atmospheric and kindred causes. When, however, he says that the yellow dun is a yet further variation, I strongly incline to disagree. If the

yellow dun is merely the olive dun in its most summery dress, how is it that one may constantly see hatches of olive and of yellow duns taking place at the same time? This overlapping points towards the species being distinct. Again, there is a small fly which comes on in great quantities in some rivers, which is called by anglers the watery dun: this I am inclined to regard as distinct from the ordinary olive or blue dun. It is not uncommon to find this insect on at the same time as the larger and more attractive olive duns, which the trout usually seem more partial to. This watery dun is, for some reason, effective at times against smutting fish, which will not look at any other pattern, whether a fancy one or an imitation of some natural insect. The iron-blue is quite a distinct species from the olive. It comes on chiefly on cold days in summer, but not with the constancy of the olive. One Sunday in July I found the backwashes of the Derbyshire Wye

copiously sprinkled with the iron-blue, and the trout rising at the fly with earnestness for an hour or two. Foster says that he once saw during a hot summer a great hatch of the iron-blue upon the Dovedale length of the Dove. It completely enveloped the summits of the surrounding rock, which appeared to be enveloped by a thick blue mist. The grannom, too, comes on at times in great quantities, on the Lambourne and other southern streams, and then sport is usually very moderate, for however good an imitation the fly may be which the angler is using, it has but a very small chance amongst such a vast crowd of natural insects. I remember an astounding hatch of the olive dun on the Derbyshire Wye one misty day in July 1891. It lasted for about three hours in the afternoon, and fish were rising all over the stream during that time. In one large backwash there must have been quite a dozen trout all rising at the fly at the same time. Yet I could not succeed with the imitation,

for directly it fell on the water it was surrounded and closely accompanied by a host of natural flies. I was driven to seek spots where the fly was the least thick, and by these tactics did contrive in the end to kill a brace and a half of trout and a brace or so of grayling ; but it was the most discouraging work. These amazing hatches, whether of duns, May-flies, or March-browns, are rarely favourable to the angler. When the sedge is hatching in immense quantities, as it sometime does by the Darent, Kennet, and other south-country streams, one has more right to expect sport, because it does not sit on the water and sail down like *ephemerae*, but buzzes about the river-side, now and then by chance falling into the water, where it is eagerly seized by the trout. Big hatches of fly at night are usually even more disappointing than those in the daytime, unless the insect be the sedge.

A great and well-deserved favourite amongst south-country anglers is the

alder, a flat-winged insect of the *Sialidae* family, which commonly is found crawling about the growth of the river-side. The alder is well-nigh indispensable to the dry-fly angler on southern waters, and, like the olive dun, it will kill throughout the season. A large alder is sometimes the best lure for a tailing trout, and as a last resource it is often used by dry-fly anglers, sunk and downstream when there is a ripple on the water.

The red quill is not a very striking likeness of the natural insect, but it is a most useful fly, and, like the red spinner, especially good on summer evenings. The pretty yellow dun is not nearly so important to the dry-fly angler as the olive dun, because it does not go on steadily hatching throughout the day and the season, being essentially a summer fly. It is, however, a useful insect,<sup>1</sup> and the dry-fly angler may find himself in difficulty when there is a hatch of

<sup>1</sup> I doubt this now (June 1910).

yellow duns, and he has not any with imitations. I believe the insect occurs but sparingly on a good many dry-fly waters, and at considerable intervals. There is also a much larger insect belonging, apparently, to the *Ephemeridae*, in size about between a large olive dun and a May-fly, with upright wings of a lovely primrose colour. It occasionally comes on in small quantities on warm summer days. I have seen a few specimens sailing downstream on Hertfordshire and Derbyshire waters, and now and again a trout taking one. This insect is sometimes confounded with the yellow sally owing to its colour, but the yellow sally is a flat-winged fly, of the *Perlidae* order. I have touched on this insect as being apparently one of the *Ephemeridae*, because it has the characteristics of that family of water flies, the upright wings and the habit of sailing downstream as the duns and May-flies do. But I have not been able to identify it absolutely with any species described by those who



have written with authority on water flies.<sup>1</sup> The water flies of the class with which the angler is concerned do not seem to have received the attention they well deserve from modern entomologists. The May-fly is one of the few water insects imitated by the fly-dresser, that has been carefully studied through the various stages of its existence. The researches of Swammerdam,<sup>2</sup> Réaumur,

<sup>1</sup> It is the little May dun (*Baetis longicauda*) of Ronalds. I remember seeing quite a hatch of it at Bransbury Common on the Test some years ago. The trout took it well. I had no imitation, so put up a small artificial May-fly and drifted this downstream on a long line to a rising trout which took it at once ; but he broke away.—June 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Swammerdam was one of the greatest of all entomologists, though his working life as a naturalist was compressed within a period of ten years, from 1663 to 1673. He had the qualities indispensable to greatness in a naturalist, such as absolute truthfulness, entire devotion to his work, and a great power of concentration. The labours of the man, according to the sketch furnished by Boerhaave, were astounding. The day he gave up to the insects he was studying ; much of the night to writing what he had seen and learnt during the day. “By six o'clock in the morning in summer he began to find enough light to enable him to trace the *minutiae* of natural objects. He was hard at work till noon in full sunlight, and bareheaded, so as not to obstruct the light, and his head streamed with profuse sweat. His eyes, by reason of the blaze of light and microscopic toil, became so weakened that he could not observe minute objects in the afternoon, though the light was not less bright than in the morning, for his eyes were

and of several entomologists and anglers of modern times, have thrown a great deal of light on the interesting life-history of that insect, but very little is known for certain about the duns, and next to nothing about the still smaller insects, the smuts or curses upon which trout and grayling prey.

There remain, in our list of flies more or less indispensable to the dry-fly angler, two insects to speak of—the March-brown and the May-fly, with its *imago* the spent gnat. It may be urged that the March-brown is rather for the wet-fly than the dry-fly angler, as it chiefly appears on the more tumultuous streams where the fishing is with the wet fly. It is a very good fly in the moorland streams of the west country, good as the famous blue upright. But the March-brown is also good at times to the dry-fly angler. The artificial will kill on various streams

weary and could no longer perceive readily.” Further, Boerhaave tells us that Swammerdam, who employed tools so fine as to need whetting under the microscope, would spend whole days in clearing a caterpillar.

where the natural insect is never seen from one year's end to another's. I fancy that the Lea, far up towards its source, is such a stream, and only a few days ago I met an angler who had just had good sport—two brace of trout going 9 lbs.—with a small March-brown fished dry. Foster, the author of the *Scientific Anglers*, who fished in both styles, found it a good fly on the Dove, which has the natural insect. Like the alder, the March-brown, when there is a ripple on the water, is sometimes used with effect by disappointed dry-fly anglers as a wet fly downstream.

Last on the list comes the May-fly. It used to be a pleasant tradition that the appearance of "the drake" meant baskets and bags full to overflowing of heavy trout in the pink of condition, and that during the "May-fly carnival," as the period at which the insect appears—usually in the south the last few days of May and the first ten days or fortnight of June—has been named by enthusiasts,

even the least expert angler might be sure of plenty of sport. Possibly in old days, when the natural insect was used—as it is still on the Dove, and on the West Meath lakes—sport during the May-fly fortnight was more certain than it is to-day, though the nice handling of the natural insect must—in rivers at least where the fly has to be cast rather than allowed to be carried by the wind—require a good deal of skill. Certainly the May-fly season to-day on dry-fly waters does not as a rule bring great sport save to the skilful angler. Good bags are often made on the Test, Itchen, Kennet, Derbyshire Wye, and indeed on most dry-fly waters where the May-fly regularly appears, by good anglers, who can wait for perhaps two or three days whilst the fish are feeding on the insect before it reaches the surface—or before it actually emerges from the shuck—and catch them later when they come fairly on at the floating fly. It is too often the lot of a busy man to come in hot haste from his work in answer

to the keeper's telegram, "May-fly up," and spend his day or two waiting in vain for the trout to rise at the floating insect, instead of bulging all day at the *nymphae* below the surface. Again, whatever it may have been in the past, it is rare now on waters where the trout are accustomed to the sight of gut that the appearance of the May-fly makes for less wariness in the fish. The bungler, especially if the wind is against him, finds trout nearly as hard to take with the May-fly as with duns, though once hooked they have less chance of escape through the size and strength of the hook. To cast the May-fly in the teeth of the wind is, I think, about the least agreeable kind of dry-fly fishing. In wet weather, too, the work is hard, as the fly requires much drying: at such times the paraffin bottle is very useful.

So much for the drawbacks and difficulties of the May-fly. We may now turn to the bright side, for the May-fly season, despite its frequent disappoint-

ments and failures, is the most pleasant angling time in the year. Even in this climate we may usually look for pleasant weather when the fly is at its thickest, and never is the river-side more beautiful and luxuriant than now—the time “between the wild roses and the June.”

When the trout, having had their fill of the *nymphae*—on which they almost always feed freely at the beginning of the hatch—settle down to a good steady rise at the floating insect, the dry-fly angler should be truly in his element. To spot, stalk, cast to, rise, hook, play, and land a heavy fish in perfect condition, with a close imitation of the natural insect which that fish has been feeding on, is always his chief ambition. To hook and kill a good fish by chance, to hook and kill one with an artificial fly that does not imitate that on the water, to hook and kill one by fishing downstream and with a sunk lure—in none of these can there be the entire feeling of satisfaction which comes from achieving “the

real thing." I know that some may regard this as the mere affectation of the dry-fly purist; but it is the feeling amongst a large number of dry-fly anglers. Perhaps some foreign sportsman would regard an English gunner in not shooting into the brown of a covey, or in flushing his bird before firing at it, as a shooting purist. The analogy is, I admit, not quite perfect, because it is not unsportsmanlike to deviate, even in dry-fly fishing, a little now and then from the main principles of sport; but it may possibly help to persuade sceptics that affectation is not quite the term to apply to those who are only quite satisfied when they have achieved what they regard as the real thing in dry-fly fishing.

Now there is no season when the real thing is likelier than during the May-fly hatch, and when trout are rising earnestly at the floating insect. A good trout rising hard at May-flies will not often look at fancy flies, small or large, and, more, he will not look at the artificial

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May-flies put before him unless they are an excellent likeness of the natural fly which he is taking. Large quantities of the May-flies one sees in the angler's box and in the shop-windows may fairly be described as useless. In his chapter on the Wye, Mr. J. E. Booth—no more skilful or successful angler than Mr. Booth ever cast a dry fly on a Derbyshire water—offers some valuable remarks on the best kind of artificial May-flies for this stream. The hackle fly, which he recommends, and which he may almost be said to have introduced a few years since on the Rutland length of the stream, might, I believe, be much more generally used. I should, however, somewhat hesitate to start out to fish certain of our southern streams, where trout run very big, unless provided with a May-fly somewhat larger than the winged imitation now commonly dressed by Manchester makers for the Derbyshire waters.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> I have gone back, however, to these small-winged May-flies.—June 1910.



fly *does* vary somewhat in size in different rivers ; and I can remember at least one instance, when having exhausted my stock of light-coloured and large May-flies, I found the smaller and darker imitation useless. This instance, which I have recalled to myself time after time, though it happened not many years ago, may be worth relating.

On a very sultry June day, and towards the end of the May-fly season, I fished a stretch of fine water in Hertfordshire which was said to hold some heavy trout, and had not been tried more than two or three times that year. I found the water an ideal one for big trout, but terribly overgrown with weed through its entire length. There was no May-fly hatching when I reached the water, and very little small fly about. The sun was extremely powerful, and the chances of sport seemed remote in the morning and the early hours of the afternoon. I did, however, after a time, find a trout lying very high in the water, in a streamy place, and under the

shade of a great oak. He would not look at small flies, and took no notice of a small May-fly which was put over him. I then tried the fish with a large and very light coloured May-fly with straw body, and to my surprise he rose at this, at the first cast, and was hooked. A short, sharp rush upstream, a quick return, and he was in the weeds; the hook came away, and a good trout was lost. After this, I found nothing stirring till the evening, when the spent gnat came on in fair quantities. There was not a breath of wind, and the sultriness of the evening was hard to bear, so that I took off my coat and fished in my shirt-sleeves. Suddenly I found myself amidst such a rise of big trout as I had never seen before nor imagined. The stream at this point being rather rapid, the fish made a considerable noise as they came eagerly at the spent gnat, and I could see at least half a dozen heavy fish within fifty yards well up. I soon hooked a very big trout indeed in a small backwater, which after two furious

rushes took me into a great bunch of weeds, out of which nothing I could do would stir him. I had to break the cast after wasting quite ten minutes, and hastily tying on another fly tried a fresh fish. But ill-fortune pursued me, and I lost one big fish after another, till my stock of large May-flies—which was very poor to start with—was exhausted. Then I again tried a smaller May-fly, but in vain. Ultimately I turned to a large palmer dressed on a double hook. The fly would not sink properly, and therefore had to be used as a huge dry fly. So eager were the big trout that they rose to this lure, and I got a beautiful fish of  $3\frac{1}{4}$  lbs. almost directly with it. The heaviest fish I hooked that evening was the heaviest trout I have ever hooked, and I was quite unable to handle him with success. It was the rise, not of a season, but of a lifetime. I have been on this same water several times since, and have never found a single fair-rising trout; but if it ever falls to my lot to fish that wonderful

water again, about the time the May-fly or spent gnat is well on, I shall know what sort of casts to use. Fine gut in such a weedy water, and against such heavy trout, is useless. The only way to deal with heavy fish on water of this kind, which is full of great patches of thick weed, is to use a big fly on strong gut and to give them when hooked next to no law. When a trout goes to a small patch of weeds he may often be forced or enticed out. A steady, not too severe, downstream strain on him will sometimes prevail; at other times, or after this first device has failed, a loose line and five or ten minutes' grace may fetch him out. But when a very heavy trout goes into a dense mass of weeds the angler's chance of getting him out is usually very slight. There is an instrument for cutting away weeds, but I think it is not worth the trouble of carrying about; where the patch of weeds is small it is unnecessary and dangerous, and where the patch is very large it is useless.

Besides the imitations of natural flies I have spoken of as generally used by the dry-fly angler, there are a great number of fancy patterns, which seem to resemble closely nothing in Nature, but which, from some mysterious cause, trout sometimes prefer to the other artificials. There are various sorts of very gaudy, wingless bumbles which are always good for grayling, and sometimes for trout, on dry-fly waters. Then all manner of monstrosities, ranging from the dusty miller to the hateful Alexandra—both ought to be prohibited—are used at times as trout flies, sunk and downstream. I am not, however, laying down the severe rule that all fancy flies are unfair. I often use two fancy flies, the wickham and the governor. The former is the most famous of all the fancy flies used by dry-fly anglers, and it is in great favour on the Test and Itchen. On the more-fished stretches of the Derbyshire Wye I have never found it of service, and I doubt whether any fancy fly is needed in the

Wye, the dun being there constant. But on many waters the wickham, when there is or is not natural fly out, is a capital lure. I imagine trout take it for a dun, but this is mere conjecture. The governor, which some think is taken in mistake for an alder, is a good fly, especially on the less-fished and smaller southern streams. Fancy flies should, I think, only be used in dry-fly fishing when there is no natural fly out, and the fish are suspicious of imitations, or when there is a quantity of natural fly out and the imitation is not good enough to attract them.

The size of the artificial fly to be used is always a very important matter, sometimes more important than the shade of the wings, body, and hackles. Where the water is low and clear, the smaller the fly the surer will the angler be of getting rises. But then the smaller the size of hook the smaller the angler's chance of landing his fish when it has risen and been hooked. The hold of the very small hooks must always be precarious, slight,

and when the hook is very small it has to be attached to the finest of gut: to land a heavy trout in good condition, especially in an awkward place, is then a hopeless task. I think it will also be found that with these minute hooks there is small chance of the trout hooking himself; it is necessary to strike with great care. The hooks on which the poor imitations of the smuts are dressed verge on the ridiculous. They are really scarcely worth a place in the dry-fly angler's box. I always use as large a hook in dry-fly fishing as the water will allow. Last Easter [1895] I tried for several days very small hooks—the smallest on which duns are dressed—and though I rose many more trout than usual, I lost many more.

Few dry-fly anglers now use the old-fashioned fly attached to the gut. The eyed hook, either turned down or turned up—one is probably quite as good as the other—has come into almost general use. It is very easily attached to the gut by Major Turle's knot, and it does not

“crack” off nearly so much with a wind behind the angler’s back as does the fly dressed on gut. Again, the eyed flies bought one season are of service for the next season, as they have about them no gut to grow rotten. The eyed flies, dressed with split wings for floating, nowadays really leave very little to be desired. There are many firms which turn out beautiful imitations of the duns, spinners, May-flies, March-browns, etc., and turn them out at quite a reasonable price. It is a nice accomplishment for the angler to tie his own trout flies, but it needs incessant practice and time for the amateur to keep up with the high standard of the professional. The general view amongst dry-fly anglers seems to be that it is hardly worth doing.

Finally, a few short and clear injunctions may be given for those beginners who are perplexed as to this department of dry-fly angling. Make your list of everyday flies as moderate as possible. Only use fancy patterns when imitations



of Nature are of no avail. Avoid altogether such monstrosities as the Alexandra. Do not use smaller hooks than you are obliged to use, and the very smallest on which the imitations of the smuts are dressed do not use at all. Put not too much faith in local patterns and prejudices, but prefer to believe that a well-dressed imitation of the olive dun will, if presented properly to a fish rising at olive duns, prove as good a fly on one river as on another—because it is not the fly, so much as the hand directing it, which kills the trout.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE DRY FLY IN DERBYSHIRE

(By J. E. BOOTH)

WHATEVER may be said from the angler's point of view of any one of the Derbyshire trout streams is more or less applicable to all the streams having their rise in, or flowing through, the Peak district, and I propose, therefore, to treat the Wye as a typical Derbyshire water. The Wye may be said to possess, at least somewhere throughout its comparatively short but deviating course from Buxton to its junction with the Derwent at Rowsley—sixteen miles as the crow flies—all the varied characteristics of the Goit, the Derwent, and the Dove, with their respective tributaries. In its upper





THE DARENTH.

reaches, as far down as Miller's Dale, the Wye bears a striking resemblance to the Dove, where it glides from a bed of weeds into a deep mysterious pool, almost hidden from daylight between overhanging grey limestone rocks and cliffs, the foundations of some towering hill, and now again revealing itself to full view pursues its course over occasional and picturesque natural weirs of moss-covered fragments of rock, skirted on the one hand by wooded and precipitous hill-sides, on the other by grassy swards.

Again, in Wye's lowest reaches, its character is similar to that of the Derwent—gravelly shallows, and deep, shady pools. Its reaches in the fresh and open meadows of Bakewell and of Rowsley have a charm peculiar to themselves, and unsurpassed, familiar to angler and tourist alike for their close associations with time-honoured Haddon and renowned Lathkill. These Derbyshire streams have from Charles Cotton's days been considered typical troutling waters, as far

as fly fishing is concerned, and of late, with few exceptions, any lure but the artificial fly is universally and rightly prohibited.

Some southerners may mistrust the claim of the Wye, which is in part a limestone stream, to rank with chalk streams as a so-called "dry-fly water." Yet it is certain that for at least twelve or fifteen years the Wye's reputation of possessing the essential characteristics of a genuine dry-fly water throughout its course has been upheld by many good anglers. The question of what constitute the distinguishing features between dry and wet fly streams is a different matter. Some such difference apparently, if not actually, exists, but where to draw the line may be a question often most difficult to decide. It would not, for instance, be said of the Tweed or lochs of Scotland that they were dry-fly waters, and yet our small duns, when dried and floated on them, have sometimes proved successful, much to the astonishment of the local

experts, who as a rule do not turn out when the water is low and clear, believing sport under such conditions to be, if not impossible, at least indifferent. Almost everywhere indeed has the dry-fly method of fishing now found its way.

What, then, are the essential characteristics of a dry-fly, as opposed to a wet-fly stream? Well, deep, sluggish, yet clear and weedy streams, with shallow backwaters and eddies at intervals along the banks, in which probably most of the fly is hatched, are chiefly suitable for the dry fly. Under such conditions the natural fly has more favourable opportunities of hatching perfectly, and remaining on the water when hatched, than upon a rapid and shallow river, where the fly after hatching often takes immediately to the wing, on account of the turbulence of the water, before a fish has time to seize it. In such streams it must be less exertion for a fish to feed under water, on partly developed larval flies, than on winged

food at the surface. Again, these streams with muddy and weedy beds afford greater supplies and varieties of *Ephemeridae*, *Phryganidae*, *Perlidae*, and other water-bred insects, than do shallow and rocky beds.

As the Wye, save in the matter of sluggishness, belongs to this class of stream, the dry fly there has proved most successful, and has surpassed the wet fly as being a more suitable method throughout the season, as securing better baskets of fish and heavier specimens, and of covering water in which a wet fly could not be used. Nor does it mean the monotony which must necessarily accompany the wet-fly method. But, whatever advantages there may be in the use of the dry fly, it is necessary, in order to obtain sport, especially in the spring months of the year, to have occasional recourse to the wet-fly method, and even later on, as a rising fish cannot always be induced, even though up at natural flies on the surface of the water, to accept the



dry artificial similarly offered to him, though he will often do so if it be sunk a little. This is especially the case in a full water, when the fly (which should be dressed with a turn or two of tinsel round the body) must be cast close in under the opposite bank. Similarly in the May-fly season, though feeding off the fly in the *sub-imago* state just after being hatched, trout often cannot be induced to take the floating imitation; but they will frequently do so if a hackle fly be sunk, or even used on the surface, provided it be wet. Some people have an idea that the hackle fly cannot be used dry. As a matter of fact, a hackle floats better than a winged one, though it is not probably so easily discerned on the water. Whether an imitation of the May-fly, or any other species of *Ephemeridae*, when the hackle fly is floated dry, or even partially so, it presents a striking resemblance to the natural fly drawing itself out of the shuck in its metamorphosis from the *nympha* to the *sub-imago* state—at which time the

natural insect is most eagerly sought after by fish.

The inference to be gathered from this is, not that the wet-fly method as far as it goes is defective, nor that it has ceased to be practised with success, but that the dry-fly method is—all circumstances considered—the more appropriate, and the more approved one, though, as already pointed out, one method at one time proves better than the other, and *vice versa*. Even a combination of the two systems was carried into effect by a friend of mine who, whilst admitting the superiority of a dry fly, was so reluctant to abandon the old wet three-fly system, that he dipped his tail-fly in paraffin oil, in order to make it float, and allowed the other two flies to sink or dangle on the surface of the water—thus retaining, by the use of the droppers, the old system! At those times when the wet fly has to be resorted to, the bumbles, the principal of which are the salmon, claret, and furnace, that have long been famous

lures, both on the Wye and neighbouring streams, should not be forgotten.

As almost every river has its own particular fly, or flies, so has the Wye its olive dun, which largely predominates in numbers over any other insect throughout the whole season, and forms the staple surface-food of the trout. This olive dun appears to be no other than the blue dun of Ronalds, though some consider it as quite a distinct species. Whether this be so or not, is of more practical importance to the naturalist than to the angler, whose primary object is the imitation as nearly as possible of the fly as it presents itself for the time being on the water.

The olive dun undergoes a variety of changes in size and shade throughout the season, all of which are sometimes actually to be seen in the course of a single day; and these seem dependent upon the time of the year, temperature, moisture, wind, and state of weather generally. In March, for instance, it is often found and comes on in large numbers as the blue dun,

particularly if a cold north-westerly wind be blowing downstream. In this month, a hare's-ear, with gold-ribbed body, is the pattern chiefly used, and is in fact a good one the season through. In April, and as the weather becomes milder, it gradually assumes a more olive shade, the imitation of which is usually dressed on No. 0 or 1 size of hook, with olive-coloured silk body, with or without a gold rib. It is then known as the cold-day olive, and is certainly rightly named, for the largest hatches are to be seen on cold, wet, windy days, even when there are occasional snow showers.

Warmer weather brings with it an infinite variety of lighter shades, as well as of sizes, the imitations being dressed with stained olive quill bodies, with dun and brown hackles, on sizes from Nos. 000 to 1, and occasionally even larger, which is found none too big at times, when an exceptionally large female comes on, as it sometimes does, in great quantities, on a showery afternoon, with

intermittent gleams of sunshine; this is especially the case when it has been preceded in the morning by a hatch of the small dark male fly, which is only occasionally taken, and then rarely by any save the small fish.

So characteristic of the Wye is the olive dun, that dressed on sizes Nos. 00 and 1 and of two shades, light and dark, one angler ought, taking the season through, successfully to hold his own with it against another in possession of unlimited choice of patterns.

But whatever the standard fly may be for the time being, on the Wye, or on any other water for that matter, every angler has his pet pattern by which he swears, and often justly enough too. It is now no longer deemed necessary, even on dry-fly streams, to cater for the fastidious tastes of trout by presenting fly after fly of every conceivable shade and size, every one of which is doomed to rejection. Such a process, when resorted to, often means a mere waste of time and patience,

and an ultimate return to the original pattern, to which, to one's agreeable surprise, the fish falls a victim.

The trout's appetite often depends on the nicety of the cast, the absence of the least sensation of a drag, and a well-cocked and a perfectly dry fly.

Really to satisfy himself as to the truth of these assertions, the angler has only to make an autopsy of one of his fish to see the immense variety of flies it must have taken in the short time previous to its capture. This will convince him how unnecessary are so many changes of fly. When change becomes necessary, the purpose may most likely be served, not by adopting another and distinct pattern, but rather by selecting a fresh fly of the same pattern. Its previous persistent rejection may not seldom be attributed to the fact that it was not completely dry, which encouraged the suction of the water the moment the fly fell upon the stream. This would result in the hackle being submerged, and con-

sequently in an unnatural appearance being imparted to the fly quite unlike the delicate way in which the natural insect alights and sits upon the water.

It indeed resolves itself, often enough, into a question of, not so much what the trout wants, as what the fisherman says he must take. Given two equally capable experts with dissimilar patterns, the result might well be the same provided the patterns were of equal size and of subdued colours. Size is of more importance than colour, and if the fisherman can only suppress his superfluous energy in striking, the smaller the size the better the chance of rising trout, notwithstanding the maxim of a well-known Derbyshire hand, "the larger the fly the bigger the fish."

The angler should not, of course, bind himself to one particular pattern, which would be an unnecessary handicap. Desirous, moreover, as he may be, of limiting the selection of patterns, and of thus being able to concentrate his

attention on the casting, striking, and playing of the fish, the cutting down of the number of patterns to two or three kinds might tend to divest the sport of some of its incidental charm. It might, too, tend to reduce the "glorious uncertainty," which has hitherto been regarded as inseparable from fishing as from various other sports. There are times when it is not always possible to coax a trout into the angler's way of thinking, cast as nicely as one may, for the fly for the time being hatched and on the water, and that only, will the fish take. An instance of this not unfrequently occurs on cold days of spring and early summer, when, though large quantities of olives are on the water and but few rising fish taking them, suddenly, from some apparently unaccountable reason, trout are to be seen eagerly rising at what seem to be the same small dark olives still coming down thickly. On closer inspection they are found to be taking the little iron-blue duns, which, here and



there mixed with the olives, are at a distance not unlike them. These hatches occur at intervals, and last for only a short time. In about a quarter of an hour not a fish can be found stirring, even though the olives continue as before to sail along. Presently, say after an interval of another quarter of an hour, the iron-blue comes on again, and is again eagerly sought after by the fish. These spasmodic hatchings are much more noticeable in regard to this than to other members of the *Ephemeridae* family.

Other kinds of flies might be exemplified as claiming more or less attention during the spring months, such as the red spinner or *imago* of the olive, the jenny spinner or *imago* of the iron-blue; but these are of most importance on summer evenings. Others again, like the sand-fly, yellow dun, little May dun, turkey brown, yellow sally, and black gnat, though considered early flies, are often more numerous and used with greater success later in the year, and

after the May-fly season. The May-fly is generally at its height in the second week in June (third week in the upper waters in Miller's Dale). It occupies the first three weeks of the month, but is not freely taken on first emerging from the shuck. During the first day or two the fish are to be seen pursuing the flies for several feet downstream, as if in doubt whether to take them or not. These preliminary hatches appear to consist chiefly of the smaller and darker male flies, or bastards as they are termed. They are followed by an increased hatch of the female, for which the fish show a decided preference. The hatches are by no means uniform with regard to locality, as in some places scarcely an odd specimen is to be seen, whilst in others, especially on the mill-dams, where the water is sluggish, rather shallow, and weedy, there are large quantities of the insects. Even when well up, fish during these first few days, for some unaccountable reason, often totally refuse the May-fly, and are

to be seen taking small light duns or black gnats, with which the water at this season is covered. This, of course, necessitates a change of fly to dun or black gnat.

Experience, indeed, suggests that it is the better plan to start and fish steadily throughout with a small dun or gnat mounted on a fine cast, till one comes across a fish actually taking May-fly only, and then to change to the artificial May-fly. It is a good plan to have a May-fly cast wound round the hat, and well soak and stretch the cast before coming out. To change casts in this way takes up very little time, and it is in fact really one's only immediate resource, as a May-fly if attached to a fine dun cast is too much tax upon the gut, which will not stand the wear and tear of drying for very long without becoming weak.

On the whole, fishing with the May-fly, on at any rate the Wye, is to my mind somewhat disappointing and unsatisfactory. When the trout are rising at

the fly there is little worth calling sport—unless the fish run large—inasmuch as very little skill is required for their capture.

To fish, therefore, with a small fly and fine tackle, even in the May-fly season, with the occasional change suggested, will give better sport, heavier baskets, and better-conditioned fish; besides which it is infinitely more creditable than fishing throughout with a stout cast and large May-fly.

Decidedly the best pattern of May-fly, and the pattern most used on the Wye, is the hackle one, which is dressed with the feathers from the Canadian summer duck, with a straw body. The best of the winged patterns is that with stained mallard wing. It should be dressed small, and should float well cocked, to be of any use. The end of the season—that is, about the third or fourth week in June—is considered by many to be the best for the use of the May-fly.

If the weather remain unchanged, the rise of May-fly takes place about the same



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time each day, varying from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., according to circumstances, with a renewed rise about sunset.

The May-fly over, the following week or two are generally considered unproductive, as are the few weeks preceding its appearance, when the fish are supposed to be busy feeding off the *nymphae* before the hatch. After the May-fly the trout are too gorged for a time to rise to any extent. The evening is the only time at this season to look forward to, and the rise does not then commence till after eight o'clock, though lasting on favourable evenings till ten o'clock, when it becomes too dark to see where to cast. This rise consists generally of light duns and spinners. If the weather should happen to be hot and sultry, towards nine o'clock in the evening the water is often covered with miscellaneous insects, and it becomes difficult to detect the particular fly being taken, though every fish in the river seems to be rising frantically at some invisible insect.



The weather being hot, with dry, easterly puffy winds, and with evenings close and sultry, the "curse" may continue for weeks, during which time every conceivable means used to tempt the fish, either with its imitation or any other pattern, seems to be a failure. This curse is very minute, measuring only about one-twelfth of an inch across the wings when stretched out. It has a short, dumpy body, white all over, except for a chocolate-coloured band round one part of it, and it has the appearance of a tiny moth both in wings and body. The first time I became acquainted with it was one evening immediately after the May-fly was over. Suddenly a furious rise began all over the stream, and ceasing to get any result from patterns of spinners I had been using with success up till then, my curiosity prompted me to strike a match and examine a quiet backwater, which I found literally peppered with these midges. On closer examination, I found my coat and hat also covered with



them. Even if there had been light enough to see, an artificial, however close an imitation, would have had no real chance amongst such vast quantities of naturals.

Fishing persistently every evening till this curse disappeared—which happened only when a spell of wet weather came on—I took a fish occasionally with a pale, watery dun, and do not remember any one else doing much better. In fact, its appearance was an indication that the fishing, so far as killing trout was concerned, had come to a close for the day, and it was marked by most of the fishermen returning home. After seeing the last of this annoying and tantalizing insect, we come to the best of the evening fishing, which is in July and August. Then the red spinner above all others is the fly to put on, provided the fish are taking any kind of *Ephemeridae* at all—for if there are no *Ephemeridae*, in the way of duns and spinners, coming down, and it be the hot and sultry evening as

above described, innumerable and indescribable smuts make their appearance, at which only the grayling and small trout are as a rule to be seen rising. In such cases I have found a black gnat with the wings clipped off, or better still the little chap dressed with peacock harl, on size No. 000, the most effective. Sometimes a watery dun is good, especially when grayling are rising at smuts; and this should also be dressed very small.

Perhaps for midday fishing on the Wye, August and September are, as a rule, the best months, the fish being in good condition till the end of September.

The best fish, in this latter month, are to be found under the banks, and there is more or less of a rise throughout the day. If the weather be warm, a short evening rise may be looked for. On fine September mornings, when the water is to be seen gliding down with an oil-like appearance, and as though it had a thin film upon its surface, there is generally a morning rise of duns from nine to eleven,

just as the sun is taking effect and breaking through the mist. There is no fly better than the light olive for September fishing, unless the water be low and clear, when I have a fancy for the September whirling dun dressed very small.

With settled weather, and low and clear water, a preponderance of grayling will be found rising in September. In a full and discoloured water the grayling are not often found rising, which may be attributed to the fact that they have to rise to the fly from a depth of 18 inches or more ; and that they prefer flies different from those taken by trout, which prefer the families of *Ephemeridae*, *Perlidae*, or *Phryganidae*.

Fishing during the few days preceding a change for rain is generally hopeless. The river presents a dead and ditch-like appearance, without a vestige of fly, and consequently not a rise is to be seen anywhere. When rain at last comes, the preliminary showers sometimes bring large hatches of small dark olives, at which the

fish only occasionally rise. They have a habit of poking their noses out of the water at the fly, in a lazy kind of way, without taking it. When the rain has properly set in, a good hatch of larger female olives may be expected, and it is then, before the fresh water gets into and discolours the stream, that the best baskets are procured.

No rule can be laid down as to what will turn out a good day, and therefore the opportunity of a day's fishing should never be lost. What one may from appearances venture to predict will turn out an unlikely day, often proves the opposite, for nothing is more certain in dry-fly fishing than the unexpected. Who is there that has not at some time or other made his best bag when he least expected sport?

On a day during which no fly is hatched, fishing, so far as dry fly is concerned, is regarded as useless, and as a matter of fact good bags are rarely made except during a hatch of fly of the

*Ephemeridae* family. It is my opinion that for the successful production of such a hatch of *Ephemeridae* certain atmospheric conditions are of vital importance. These conditions are the presence of atmospheric moisture and the relative difference in temperature of atmosphere and water, for it is obvious that the temperature of the water must be lower than that of the atmosphere.

This can be brought about by evaporation, and it is a matter of daily experience that when water evaporates the vapour carries away heat from the water, and that this in turn produces cold. This evaporation is the result of the sun, or wind, or both, and except under these conditions of temperature and moisture a hatch of *Ephemeridae* is, I think, rarely seen. A hatch of *Ephemeridae* is unusual with a prevailing dry east wind, and when it does happen is a poor one, the flies being small, frail-looking specimens. Some of the best hatches of *Ephemeridae* occur on cold, wet days, with the wind in the

west or north-west. Again, after a hot summer day, during which there has been little or no fly, just as the sun is setting, duns often begin to come out in large numbers. This only occurs when the atmospheric moisture becomes condensed, owing to the rapid cooling of the ground by radiation after sunset, and consequent cooling of the air near the ground to below the temperature at which it begins to deposit moisture. When the atmosphere gets cooled to such an extent that a heavy mist comes on, the dun immediately disappears.

No such appearance of dun is observed on the hot, sultry evening, with wind in the east, when there is little or no dew falling: on such evenings the terrible curses made their appearance.

Whatever the day may be, either good, bad, or indifferent, a trout, if rising nowhere else, may not unusually be found in some eddy or backwater, or else at the corner of some tree-root; and even if he should not be rising, he may be tempted

into taking a nicely cocked dry fly. Particularly when the water is higher than usual, these side eddies or backwaters afford some of the most likely casts. They ought to be carefully surveyed before casting, for if this preliminary precaution be not taken, the angler may find that his fish immediately upon being hooked rushes out of the tiny, calm backwater into the strong and deep current, at the foot of which is very likely the submerged root of some huge willow tree with overhanging branches. Now, unless provision has been made in the shape of a foot or two of loose line at the reel, in case the trout should leap out of the water when in a current, a breakage almost invariably takes place.

When a fish is hooked in these awkward places, the least of two evils will be to hold on and check the rush at the onset, by keeping the rod-point well up, with a firm yet easy and accommodating grasp : should the trout manage to rush some distance below the tree-root, round which

it is impossible for the angler to get in order to land him, he may possibly be induced to come upstream by dipping the rod-point a few inches in the water and pulling gently.

For fishing in such places as these, a short, stiff rod is the best, and as the Wye at its widest is comparatively narrow, a rod of  $10\frac{1}{2}$  feet suffices to throw a line across almost any part of it. A rod of even a foot shorter is not too short for the upper reaches in Miller's Dale and Ashwood Dale, where the angler has many more difficulties to contend with in the way of wooded banks and rugged, rocky beds.

Though the trout of the upper lengths averages a greater weight than that of the lower lengths, he is not nearly so game a fish. This may be accounted for by the fact that he has not the scope, owing to the presence of a prolific growth of weed in the bed of the stream which tends to impede his progress.

Grayling decrease in numbers, but in-



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crease in size, the higher we go upstream. Miller's Dale, from my own records, produces about one grayling for every twelve trout. Still higher up, in Ashwood Dale, one might fish the season through and not take a single one. Of late years grayling have become at least as numerous in the lower Wye as trout, though their average weight is not more than 6 or 7 oz. This increase in numbers may be due to the fact that during their open season they rise poorly to the fly, and are rarely fished for ; so that the stock never gets diminished, though they rise freely and may easily be taken in spring, when they are black and out of condition.

Throughout the Wye, in addition to the variety known as the old Derbyshire trout, there are many other varieties of *Salmo fario*, or brown trout, including the Lathkill, Lochleven, and others, the result no doubt of restocking at various times.

## CHAPTER X

### AN ANGLING INN

NOT the least attractive part of the life of an angler—be he a pursuer of salmon, grayling, or trout, a stickler for the old style of sunk flies, and several of them, or a disciple of the method of which this book treats—is the pleasant evening spent in the old angling inn. It has not fallen to my lot to visit Bakewell since the rule of that fine old sporting landlord, Mr. William Greaves, came to an end two years since or thereabouts; so I cannot say any word concerning the Rutland Arms of to-day as a fisherman's haunt. But, in times not long past away, how excellent a thing it always was to shake off the dust and drought of

London life, and turn to the Rutland for a few weeks' trouting in the Wye, no matter how unfavourable the "reports"<sup>1</sup> of rivers in various quarters; and how sad to have to leave that hospitable porch after a holiday, the one demerit of which lay in its brevity! The Rutland was for very many years one of those sound old hostelries that were formerly, in the days of coaches, and even later, when the railways were as yet few and far between, a feature of English rural life. It had none of your billiard-rooms and modern contrivances and conveniences, whilst the menu was always of the simplest character. Mighty joints and a variety of sweets, amongst which the famous Bakewell pudding had a place of honour, were what one looked for most nights, and what one got even when only two or

<sup>1</sup> Why *will* these mysterious "reports," when favourable, always be telling us that Mr. So-and-so had a nice basket of two and a half or five brace, taken in the Rowsley Meadows with the carnation bumble, or the claret sherry spinner, or the great August greentail as his dropper? Why not occasionally, if editors absolutely persist in lists of taking flies, write down the names of a common dun or simple spinner? It would serve.

three sat down at the board. Yet the fare, if simple, was sound, and you were never stinted. Bakewell is not always exactly a warm and sheltered place, and on an April, May, or September evening, a bright fire in the smoking-room, to which we hastened after dinner, was seldom wanting, save in the three summer months; indeed, there are probably few regular Rutland frequenters who cannot recollect a fire at some time or other even on June or July evenings. What mighty fires, too, blazed in the hearths there in winter-time when a few enthusiasts came down to Bakewell for grayling fishing! A stranger to the place and its fine old traditions might have supposed that coal was a very cheap thing in Derbyshire judging by the way in which the fires in the coffee and smoking rooms, and not a few of the bedrooms, of the Rutland Arms were piled up when night began to close in. The landlord was not an angler himself, and had something of a contempt for fly fishing in particular,

holding that a big worm was the proper bait for a fastidious trout ; but he loved the race, and catered for it to the best of his abilities. To the anglers were allotted the best rooms, and for them the fatted calf was killed. Of all the inns which I have visited, and I have visited many, not one has left such pleasant memories as the Rutland. It was not lovely to outward view, like the Peacock at Rowsley, nor finely situated like several of the old-fashioned west-country inns, in which I have spent many a convivial angling evening ; but its hospitality knew no bounds. To not a few of us the Rutland was simply a second home.

Louis Jennings, M.P., in one of his books tells us of his tramps amongst the Derbyshire hills and dales, and how he found his way one evening to the Rutland Arms. He was not an angler or sportsman, so that some rather severe remarks which he makes on the scarcity of Wye trout need little notice. An amusing companion, however, and a

clever man Louis Jennings was, and a retort of his to an inquisitive commercial traveller who persisted in trying to find out his business, is worth recalling. It was in the coffee-room of the Rutland that the two met, and the traveller, like a grayling out of condition, was hard to "set down." After a time he asked outright what his companion "travelled in." Jennings replied, "Sir, I travel in ideas!" Later in the evening, and when the commercial one had retired, the wanderer sat gazing in a pensive mood at the flickering fire, and recalled the past days and ways of his eventful life. In a somewhat similar frame of mind I sat, but now before the glowing embers, till far into the night, and mused over some of the well-remembered summer and winter evenings at the Rutland that followed an eight or ten hour angling day in the Wye meadows.

The table-talk at an angling inn like the Rutland is naturally full of trout, and folk who know nothing and care less for these

things, and who have what they regard as more serious objects in view, may find themselves rather out of the conversation during meals. Lately, an acquaintance of mine—who is rather well content with his knowledge of sport—asked, “What book are you writing?” and at the reply, “A book on dry-fly fishing,” he exclaimed, “But surely that must be a dreadfully dry subject!” The tourists, American and English, who found themselves sandwiched at the Rutland Arms table between keen dry-fly fishermen, may sometimes have formed a like impression. Anglers are notoriously fond of “shop,” and dry-fly talk heard in the dining and smoking rooms of the Rutland must have sounded a very jargon to the non-angler. Is it not the same with the table-talk of the golfer and others? “Was anything doing at the snaggy pool?” asks Splitcane; “I have not been near it all day.” “Nothing much,” is Greenhart’s reply; “but there was a good one up in the second little backwater at the horse-

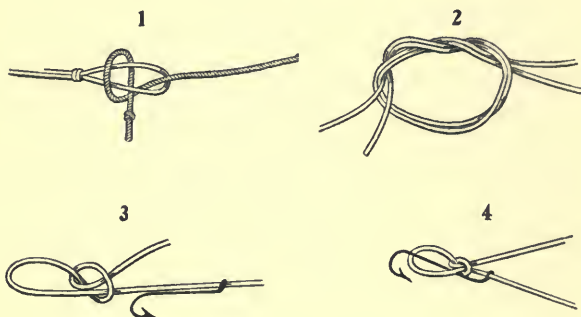
shoe bend. I managed to set him down all right after a few casts. They are 'artists' in that second backwater." "Ah," chimes in Greenhart junior, "I know that trout. He often feeds right under the hollow bank where a big thistle hangs over. There's a fearful 'drag' there. The only way is to lie flat down and dib." "Yes," flings in Splitcane, who is a detailist among detailists, "but, do you know, there's a better fish still about twenty yards farther down stream, and on the opposite side. He feeds in a tiny eddy just where two blades of grass are washed backwards and forwards by the stream." "Know him! I should think I do," is the swift response. "Why, I spent hours and hours over that trout last spring; but the fly always gets drowned in the eddy. That fish is, from the way he rises, either very big or very small—you can never get a view of him." This is the kind of talk which nobody can understand who has not had an attack of the fishing fever. Jones and Smith, who



are intent on cycling, or walking, or viewing all the old churches of the district, stare incredulous on the mention of these minute details. "Why," think they, "there are five or six miles of fishing, and there must be hundreds of backwaters and bends, and tens of thousands of thistles and blades of grass by the river! How can one of these impostors possibly know the particular thistle or bit of grass the other is referring to? The thing's impossible, and the talk mere drivel." Thus Jones and Smith, the uninitiated, and the rather suspicious. But none the less Splitcane and his friends are right. They rarely make mistakes in describing the exact position of a particular trout in a five-mile stretch of water. It is in presenting the fly to the trout, in striking too hard, or in not striking at all, in showing too much gut, or in trying to land the trout too soon, that they fall into errors. That he who never makes a mistake makes nothing, is as

true of dry-fly fishing as of anything else.

Splitcane and the Greenharts may seem inflictions to the man who hates fishing, who never can understand how people



THE DRY-FLY ANGLER'S KNOTS.

1. Knot for attaching cast to line.
2. Knot for tying strands of gut together.
3. Turle's knot for attaching the cast to the eyed hook.
4. The same knot after the loop has been made and the fly passed through it. It then only remains to draw the loop up tight and cut off the end of the gut close to the head of the fly. There are other knots besides Turle's, but none simpler or surer.

have the patience to sit watching a float from a punt all day—for that is his idea of what the angler does—and is ever ready with that saying about a worm at

one end and a fool at the other. But they are the best of company to each other and to their circle at the angling inn.

But there is in the dry-fly world a certain sprinkling of objectionable anglers to be found now and then by the stream, at the dinner-table, and in the smoking-room with its old oak chairs and its sanded floor. The least bearable type of all is the man who comes from town when nobody has done anything worth speaking of for several days past, and who, after hearing gloomy accounts of the river and the fish from every one, looks very knowing, and says, "I shall catch 'em to-morrow." It may happen that the man is a fairly skilful angler, and that on the morrow he goes out boastful, and by hook or by crook does manage to bring back a fair bag. Now, when this takes place, he is so bumptious and boastful, so free with his advice and patronising ways, that the rest of the company perceptibly shrink away from

him. Unfortunately, there is often an absolute tyro present, who freely offers himself as a peg for the braggart to hang his tall tales of the day's sport on. It is likely, too, that this objectionable angler, being very keen to make the best bag of the day, and to humiliate his fellow-anglers, is deliberately late for the evening meal. When he comes in after the first or second course, somebody will incautiously inquire, "Well, what sport?" and there is a grand chance for boasting. If the man has made a really good bag of trout, and knows by inquiries made before he entered the room that nobody else has done anything, he will begin by belittling his achievement. "Oh, a bad day; only three brace!" Then, of course, it will come out that no one else has killed a good fish. That tyro, who has been a nuisance all day by the river-side, coming up to everybody and iterating the inquiry, "What fly are they taking?" may be relied on to let the fish out of the bag. It is all very fine for the other

anglers present to pretend that they are quite unconscious of what is going on, and even to start a non-angling topic of conversation. They are really raging beneath their assumed calmness of demeanour, and when the maid brings in the trout on a large dish it will be quite impossible for them to avert their eyes and stop their ears. Among the diners there will sometimes be—especially during the holiday season—a tourist who has not handled a rod for five-and-twenty years, and he, failing the tyro, will well serve the objectionable angler's purpose. He will begin by asking, "What sport to-day, sir?" and, hearing so many brace, will declare, "Well, you ought to congratulate yourself, sir; these gentlemen tell me they have done nothing the entire day."

The objectionable angler's fish meet you at every turn. They have been brought into the dining-room and thrust under your nose for inspection, and it is not unlikely that they will reappear later

on in the smoking-room, or they may be left in the large dish on the hall-table, so that each angler as he lights his candle to go to bed will be bound to look at them once more. Of course, the "I shall catch 'em" type of angler does not, as a rule, "catch 'em"; in which case he will come back vowing that all day he has had the most accursed ill-luck that ever a man had in his life, and that he has hooked and lost more fish than he believed were in the river. One has known him declare that he got a brace and a half which he gave away to some sick villager, or to a workman, or he will say they were in poor condition, so he returned them to the water. These excuses are usually obvious enough. Even the tyro and the man who angled twenty-five years ago are not to be taken in by too much of this kind of talk.

Another aggravating man, well known in the angling world, is he who says, "Oh, the dry fly is all nonsense! I shall pull 'em out to-morrow all right, with an

Alexandra dressed with a bit of jungle cock feather ; they can't resist it." You represent to him that the water is as still as a pond, as clear as gin ; that the trout are suspicious of even a perfect imitation of the dun or May-fly on the water ; and that, therefore, they will not rise at a great glaring Alexandra composed of brilliant peacock and jungle cock feathers. He smiles, and says he never knew the jungle cock fail. Beginning to be exasperated, you tell him that the Alexandra was tried only yesterday by some one, and that the fish were only scared by it. "Ah, then," he will tell you, "the fly could not have been properly dressed ; it hadn't the right amount of jungle cock feather." The Alexandra angler is not to be denied.

These are the bores of the angling world, and there are some others besides, with a few faddists and eccentrics. One has met the angler who says he always dries his fly in his pocket-handkerchief, and the angler who declares that it is

all nonsense about various water insects coming up from the bed of the stream to the surface, and there bursting through their shuck. "Have you ever *seen* the flies coming up?" he asks, and when you tell him that entomologists say there is no doubt about it, he scoffs out that those kind of people will say anything. He is a good fellow, very likely, this last one, but with a passion for contrariety. The handkerchief man is a great theorist; so is the angler who, whatever topic is started, is sure to bring it round to the wisdom of allowing the artificial minnow in streams where there are some big cannibal trout that never take the fly, natural or artificial. Both these types are harmless, and, if you can only coax them for a little while off their pet theories, often pleasant companions. Sad to relate, however, there are to be found from time to time in most angling inns, and by most waters, pot-hunters to whom all's fish that comes to the hook. The man who kills trout under limit is worse than the man who



uses worms and other baits where only artificial fly is allowed. Truth compels one to say that the pot-hunter and the man who kills fish under the limit exist, though they are not, I think, numerous among anglers. Fly fishing, whether wet or dry, is a sport in which there is little room for such people.

I wrote of the enthusiasts who when the trouting is all over turn their thoughts to fly fishing for grayling. In several south-country streams grayling run heavy, and sometimes take the dry fly well enough in summer, as well as on crisp, bright winter days. Grayling fishing is so good in some winter seasons that there are anglers who are very well content to make Winchester, or a more sleepy little southern country town or village, their headquarters for months at a stretch. The Dove, too, and Manifold (where there are some very good grayling) tempt enthusiasts to the Izaak Walton even towards mid-winter, despite the strong and icy winds that blow down the lower end of the

Dale. The Derbyshire Wye has many grayling, though they are smaller and inferior to those of Dove. But my own experience of grayling angling there in winter-time is that a creel or bag is usually a vain encumbrance. And yet a week's fishing on that river, however few the rises, is scarcely deemed by old Wye hands to be a hardship. In winter the fly fisherman takes it very easily. There is no need to order breakfast for early hours in the morning, even less to enter into a friendly competition, such as there is sometimes at other seasons, to be first on the water. The angler, unless he belongs to that uncomfortable class of people who cannot sleep after daybreak, and who are always up at cock-crow, winter and summer, will as he goes to bed give directions to be roused at, say, half-past eight o'clock. Even when roused, he may recollect that after all it is not May-fly season, and so in drowsiness turn over for another ten minutes' doze. Then after breakfast, how leisurely he begins

to make ready for a few hours' fishing. In the height of the trouting season he grudges the time which a careful filling of the pipe needs ; tears open his letters, and digests their contents as ill perhaps as he does his breakfast ; scorns the newspapers, and frets if his boots are not ready in the hall when the anglers foregather before going out and after coming in. But here is the same man in winter even answering the more pressing of his letters before he shoulders his rod, asking for the London papers, and finally discussing whether it is worth while turning out for an hour or two. It is hard to recognise in this arm-chair angler the enthusiast who sometimes has been known to rouse the household in summer-time as he creaks downstairs soon after day-break, and goes forth without breakfast through the silent town, to see whether after all the fly may not come on before nine or ten o'clock and the fish rise at it. The truth is, though he has come ostensibly to angle for grayling, he in his

heart knows this midwinter fly fishing to be, nine days out of ten, little more than a pleasant pretence.

Nevertheless, once out, the angler is not going to be frightened indoors again till the afternoon has begun to advance, though the wind be like a knife and the day dark and depressing. There is a sort of attractive melancholy about the cold, bare stream undimpled by a single rising fish for hours together. Winter has made sad havoc of the favourite spots where the angler could linger for hours in the summer months eagerly prying under the thickly vegetated banks for trout on the feed. So complete is the wreckage, that there is now not one secluded nook by the whole stream-side. The little island where it was so good to hide oneself on days when there were many rods out, or noisy trippers about, was only a few months since a bed of great dock-leaves, sedges, and willow-herbs. Even standing up there, one could only be detected by the top of one's rod waved backwards

and forwards in a desperate attempt to get to an impossible trout which always rose right under an old stump covered with nettles on the opposite bank. Now, one sees that the island is bare; that there is not enough cover on it to hide a water-vole. Every backwater, every eddy, well hid in summer by flowering things, and therefore so full of mystery and interest, and of chances of big fish, is now cruelly exposed.

Yet one must revisit all the well-known spots, as though trout memories rather than grayling fishing were our real business. In some of the backwaters there are still a few trout hanging about, ready to come on the shallows to spawn. By four o'clock at the latest it is time to turn in. Then follows a rather tedious wait till dinner-time. But, the evening meal over, the spirits of the anglers once more rise high. Prepare then for a long evening beguiled with many stories of the bags, not of that day, but of past trouting seasons. Thus, though not a

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grayling has been touched all day, there should still be sport when the dry-fly anglers close in round the smoking-room fire, to retell the ever-fascinating tale of their many victories and their many defeats in the not uneven combat between the man and the trout.

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